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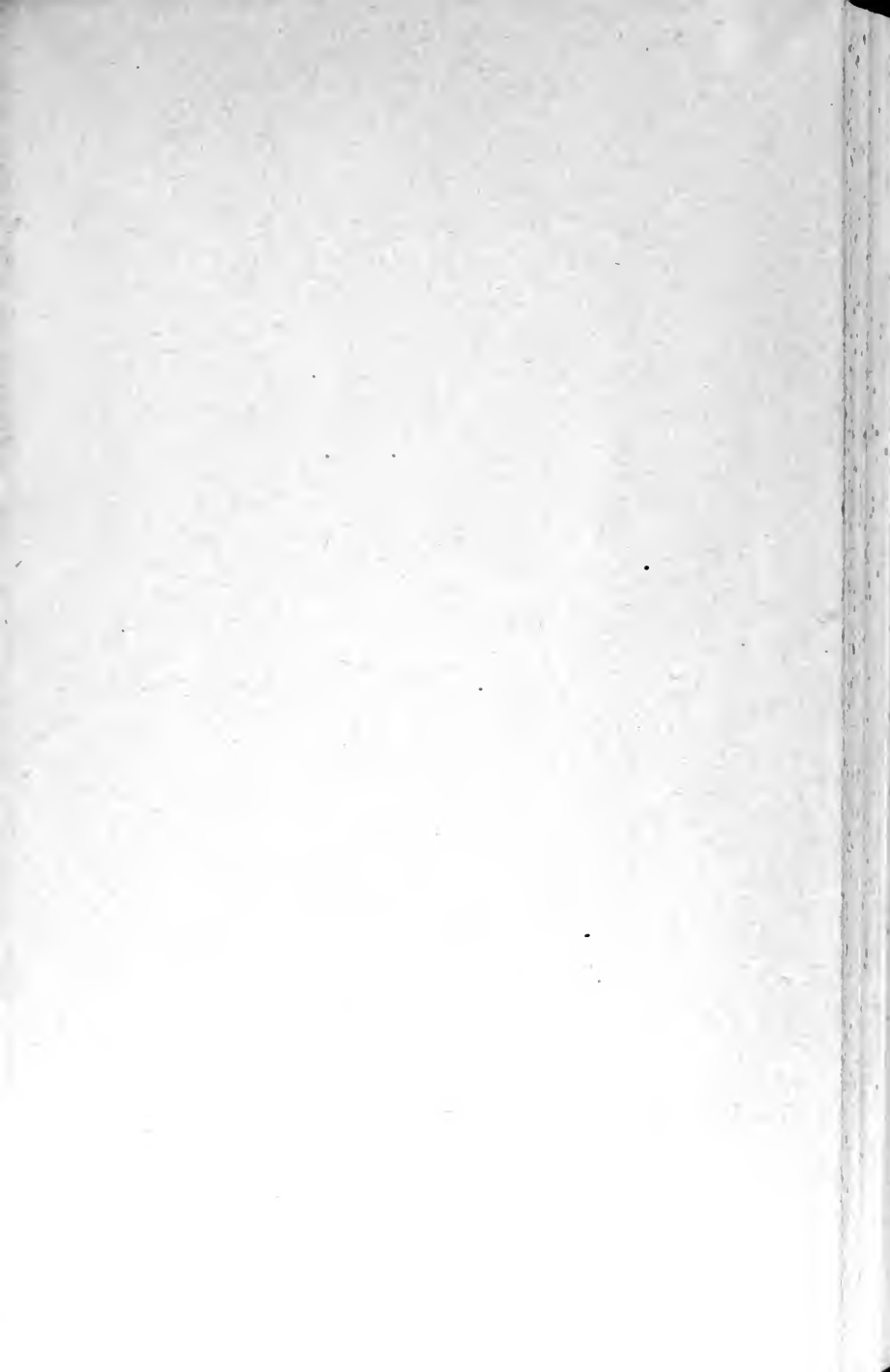
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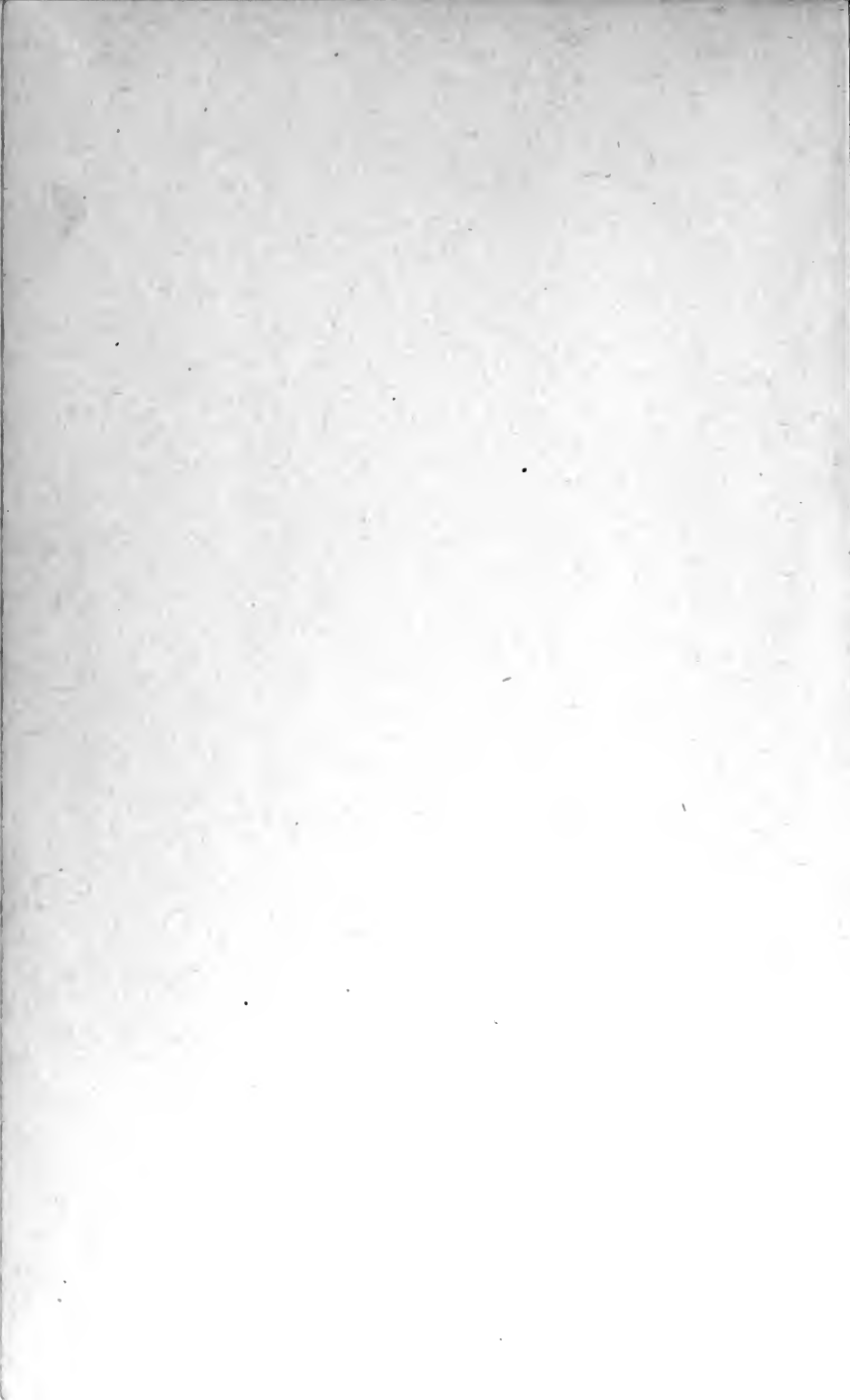


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*Nellie Edna Walked through the Woods with Dobie
and Stonewall*

YOU MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

By
Elsie Singmaster

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SINGMASTER
YOU MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

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FOR
A PROFICIENT GUIDE
TO THE VALLEY OF VIRGINIA
WHO, BEING UNNAMED
WILL NOT BE EMBARRASSED
BY CONNECTION WITH A STORY
FOR READERS YOUNGER
THAN HIMSELF

CO. SCHOOLS
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You Make Your Own Luck



YOU MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

CHAPTER I

NELLIE EDNA STRICKHOUSER sat on the upper step of the porch of her aunt's house on the Valley Pike below Harrisonburg in Virginia. She was of medium height for her sixteen years, of average weight, and, as nearly as one could guess, of medium intelligence. Her mouth had a downward droop; it was not possible to tell whether it was the permanent expression of a melancholy disposition or merely the transient expression of a dull hour. One feature especially caught the eye and held it — this was her hair which was red, like the deep part of a flame, and curly like the tip of a flame. Her eyes, fortunately, were brown and not blue. She had, it was clear, some sense of color; at least in the selection of her linen dress of golden brown she had made none of the mistakes characteristic of the red-haired.

The house, which was frame and painted white, stood about fifty feet back from the road and was

separated from it by a whitewashed paling fence and a smooth plot of grass, so smooth that one knew it to have been swept by a broom, the broom perhaps of Nellie Edna. In one corner was planted a Crimson Rambler rose from which the dead blossoms had been carefully trimmed; in the other stood a tall smoke-bush whose masses of strange feathery bloom were the curiosity and admiration of those who drove by — that is, of those who possessed the instinct of curiosity or who had the power to admire.

Over the gate hung a sign, lettered in black on a white ground. It was one of hundreds of signs of the same import in the Valley, but different from all but a very few. Painted carefully, it announced "Tourists' Lodging. Meals." Some of its fellows said, "Tourist Lodging," more said "Tourist's Lodging," others said "Lodging for Tourists."

Before the gate stood a Ford car which did not match its surroundings in neatness; it was dusty, its wheels had the mud of a whole springtime and summer upon them, and the excelsior in the cushions protruded here and there. It stood waiting with an air almost consciously patient — thus a small, worn, aged and somewhat damaged elephant might wait the pleasure of his master.

The house was, like Nellie Edna, difficult to appraise. The shutters were closed and Virginia Creeper

veiled the porch. It had altogether the proper look for a house in the middle of a summer afternoon in Virginia. The porch itself offered no view; a slight turn in the road hid Harrisonburg, and the smoke-bush hid the opposite mountain, the name of which was Massanutten.

Hidden, neither the road nor Harrisonburg nor Massanutten had any suggestion for Nellie Edna. The road was a road; it enabled you to get to church and school, though school was now over, and it brought tourists to your door if someone didn't snatch them before they got there. For Nellie Edna, Stonewall Jackson might never have ridden up and down the road, or Sheridan have galloped upon it. Harrisonburg was a town, too familiar and too little contrasted with other towns to be appreciated or admired; for Nellie Edna it might never have been subject to the somber tragedies of war. As for Massanutten — in no sense whatever did Nellie Edna lift her brown eyes to any hills.

The scene was somnolent to the eye but lively to the ear. From the shaded depths of the porch sounded voices — one, two, three. One was that of Aunt Myra, owner of the house, guardian and foster mother of Nellie Edna. It was soft, drawling, and lacking some *r*'s and most *g*'s, though Aunt Myra had no inherited right to drop *r*'s and *g*'s. Like the

great majority of the inhabitants of the Valley she was descended from Germans who had come down from Pennsylvania a century earlier. Her name had been Strickhouser and in marrying into a family of Funkhousers she had acquired no aristocratic English connections. She was a pretty woman with a very smooth, round, white face and brown hair, which curled as becomingly as the red hair of her niece. Her dress was made of bright blue foulard and both her string of beads and her stockings matched it in color.

Cousin Hallie Briscoe had, like Aunt Myra, no inherited right to her drawl, her name having been Knipe, but she had married a husband of English stock. In his company, if her car were an indication, she had lost certain Germanic principles of order. She was very stout, the waistline of her rose-colored silk dress, made by herself and trimmed with broad cream-colored lace, was marked by no belt, the location of the proper place for a belt being difficult if not impossible to figure out. Her head was small, her neck short, her smile beaming, her good nature and contentment inexhaustible.

The third of the trio on the porch was Cousin Dora Briscoe. Her maiden name had been Briscoe and she had married a Briscoe; therefore she had a right, both native and acquired, to any idiosyncrasies of the Virginia speech, especially such as had developed on the

thickly wooded side of Stony Man Mountain beyond Mount Massanutten, where she lived. She was not related to Aunt Myra or to Nellie Edna, or even to Cousin Hallie, her husband being merely a cousin of Cousin Hallie's husband.

She was a woman of extraordinary height and extraordinary thinness and wiriness. She was dressed in a trailing skirt of black wool and a white shirt waist with a standing collar and a necktie, a feminine costume whose general vogue could be recalled by Aunt Myra and Cousin Hallie but not by Nellie Edna. She looked like a man, and she sat like a man, slipping down in her chair upon the tip of her spine with her feet stretched out before her. Sometimes in moments of deeper relaxation, she rested the heel of her right foot upon the toe of her left or *vice versa*. Thus arranged, her heavy men's shoes were a remarkable sight. She had bright black eyes, smooth, thin, black hair and a brown skin. Unhappily her teeth were almost gone; since funds with which to pay a dentist were small or altogether wanting.

The voices went on and on, had been going on since ten o'clock and it was now half-past two. It was Mrs. Dora Briscoe's custom to descend from Stony Man Mountain to pay an annual visit to her husband's Valley relatives, and it was the custom of Mrs. Hallie Briscoe to take her to visit Aunt Myra. Aunt Myra

had given them, according to her custom, a substantial dinner, and it was now time for them to go. Aunt Myra was a sententious person; she was saying in her soul, "Enough is enough." It was Cousin Hallie's duty to rise and say farewell for herself and Cousin Dora, but Cousin Hallie would only sigh.

"'Spose you make a pile of money with the tourisses!" Cousin Dora made this remark for the fourth time, though "tourists" was a hard word for the almost toothless. Upon her rested the burden of conversation, and it was difficult to think of topics which would interest the other ladies, and useless to discourse upon any which especially interested her. Aunt Myra and Cousin Hallie, though talkative at times, preferred silence immediately after dinner; with ample companionship of their own kind, they knew no hunger for speech such as Cousin Dora tried to satisfy once a year.

"Yes, I make a good deal." Aunt Myra gave varying answers; sometimes she boasted a little, as now; sometimes she said vaguely, "Oh, not so much as you might think!" Sometimes she said that profits depended on the season or that her location was not altogether desirable. Now, leaning far back in her chair, her feet supported on the projecting rockers, she analyzed her situation.

"If we lived above the Half-Moon Cave'ns we

could be full to ovahflowin'. But the No'the'n people come to the cave'ns, then they turn back. That is, most of 'em do. If they're very rich, they go on to Staunton, or to Cha'lottesville to the hotels; they don't stop along the road. I see their names in the papah. Not that I'd want them at my table or in my beds! Orristocracy they are. Lofty. Proud."

"I'll say!" agreed Cousin Hallie.

"And as for me," went on Aunt Myra, "I don't think the cave'ns are so much. Wet, dirty caves, they are!"

To this, Cousin Hallie rejoined again, "I'll say!" Cousin Hallie's husband kept a gas-station where there was an opportunity to hear and acquire the most up-to-date of English. Her rocking-chair had tipped back, she let it remain in that position, though her feet dangled far from the floor. She had tiny feet for so great a body; sometimes Nellie Edna regarded them with astonishment, as though they could not be quite real. Nellie Edna was not altogether ignorant of the great world — she said to herself "Chinese feet."

"I seen in the funnies in the mo'nin' papah Little Orphan Annie got her money," said Cousin Hallie.

"Yes, an' in the evenin' Cap Stubbs and his Gran'ma were comin' home from the seashore and got on the wrong train," answered Aunt Myra.

"That poor old soul!" sighed Cousin Hallie.
"Mark my words, Milt Stubbs, he'll be mad enough!"

"I'll bet!" agreed Aunt Myra.

"A cave's a very interestin' place." Cousin Dora, who saw neither morning nor evening paper, lowered her foot and sat up. "There you are in the bowels of the yearth. Above you" — she waved her arm — "is the most beautiful fo'mations — slactamites, and below you is the stagalmities." When excited, Cousin Dora frequently interchanged her consonants, thus producing strange new words. Once transferred, the letters never returned to their original places. "Fa' below" — Cousin Dora pointed down — "is the loud rushin' of the subterraneous rivah. They put out the lights and round about is da'kness, like the da'kness of the netha'most."

Nellie Edna moved her hand so that it covered her mouth more tightly. Into her downcast eyes came a beam, as though firelight shone suddenly upon them. Here was at least a sense of humor! Aunt Myra and Cousin Hallie were not at all moved by Cousin Dora's poetic description.

"Sometimes I thought I'd move no'th," said Aunt Myra.

"Here too," said Cousin Hallie. "I tell Sam he can sell gas just as well above as below."

"I nevah went in a cave'n," said Aunt Myra.

"Nor I," said Cousin Hallie. "A dollah and a half's a good deal to pay to go in a cave."

"An' war tax to it. The war's ovah."

"I'll say! "

"I'll bet they make a sight of money! "

"I'll say! "

"And they that run it don't belong in the Valley." Aunt Myra's tone was aggrieved. "They were just goin' by and they saw what could be done."

"It ain't fair." Cousin Hallie's complaint was uttered pleasantly as she rocked back and forth. Nellie Edna wished she could give her a push, she would roll across the porch, down the steps, perhaps home. As though this wicked reflection traveled to Cousin Hallie's brain, she swung her chair forward by a powerful effort. "Well, I guess we should go." Like Cousin Dora's remark about the tourists, this was made for the fourth time.

Aunt Myra rose at once, moving a little stiffly. "Week days I'm supple, but Sundays I get stiff set-tin'. What do you say if I go along? "

As Aunt Myra spoke the chin of Nellie Edna lifted slowly from its resting-place on her cupped hand. Her mouth hardened, her eyes brightened, her very ears seemed to prick, the tips of her curls to vibrate. "If she says anything about John Niblett " — Nel-

lie Edna's mental threat was wholly figurative — "I'll kill her."

"What do you say if I go along home with you Hallie, till evenin'?" repeated Aunt Myra. "Then I can see more of Dora."

"Oh, what a hypocrite!" said Nellie Edna in her soul.

"And I can leave Nellie Edna have her beau in peace."

Nellie Edna rose to her feet, revealing all her small self. Her red hair gleamed, her eyes flashed, her cheeks flamed; she looked outraged in all her most tender feelings. As her hair was brighter than that of her kin, so was her speech clearer, harder, more rapidly uttered and more distinctly enunciated.

"I don't see that you need to do that!" she declared.

Aunt Myra laughed, and when she laughed the world listened. She produced a most beautiful and musical ripple, rising high in the scale and descending low. She laughed on and on while Cousin Hallie stood up, sighing, and Cousin Dora rose with a spring. Cousin Hallie and Cousin Dora seemed each to typify her habitat, the one the luxuriant plain, the other the less fertile and productive heights. Together they stepped into the house to fetch their hats. Hidden from them, Aunt Myra grimaced.

"At last!" said she in a whisper. "Small potatoes is what I call them. You got plenty of cold chicken an' peaches an' cake. Enjoy yourself! I think I ought to tell you, Nellie Edna — John Niblett was seen on the porch at Fickes's where that green-eyed witch lives."

"He may!" answered Nellie Edna fiercely. "I don't care."

"She has no chance if you exert yourself, not a chance. Don't be so —"

The return of Cousin Hallie and Cousin Dora interrupted Aunt Myra's warning. Cousin Dora had put on, not a hat, but a bonnet with a bouquet of red roses nodding above her brows.

"You suahly have a nice house!" said she with a sigh.

"Do you think so!" Aunt Myra spoke as if amazed.

"That's a grand Victrola!" said Cousin Dora. "They have them at the store, but none like this. Lightfoot says if we git one he'll stop practisin' his fiddle, an' I say I couldn't have that. An' Dobie, I want him to play the fiddle like his Pa."

"I think I'll get me a radio," said Aunt Myra. "Then you can heah what's goin' on in the world. I'm not quite ready with the price — two hundred dollahs even on a trade they say."

Cousin Hallie was not unsympathetic — the mention of such a sum could not but overwhelm Cousin Dora.

"What are the names of your children, Dora?" she asked, though this information had been given several times.

"Dobie, age' twelve," answered Cousin Dora. "Stonewall, age' ten, an' Woodfill, age' eight. Dobie an' Woodfill, they's named fo' Lightfoot's kin."

"Three," said Cousin Hallie meditatively.

"They's smaht boys," said Cousin Dora with a flush. "But we can't git good teachahs in the mountain; the last one didn't know mo' than a-b-ab."

Aunt Myra reappeared, self-conscious in a blue hat to match her dress and stockings. Heavily, Cousin Hallie made her way down the steps.

"I ce'tainly do wish you good luck with your beau, Nellie Edna!"

Nellie Edna made no answer. Cousin Dora looked at her intently as though she tried to shape some appropriate farewell. Not succeeding, she followed Cousin Hallie down the steps and out the boardwalk. She walked with a lope, her shoulders bent forward, her bonnet awry.

"Get dressed right away," advised Aunt Myra in a whisper. "He's likely to come early. Put on your

best dress. If he invites you to ride, ride. And what-evah you do, don't be moody! It's touch an' go with him, ma'k my wo'ds, Nellie Edna! "

Nellie Edna followed to the gate.

"Call out the window if he comes befo' you got your dress on. I wish you'd get a boyish bob, Nellie Edna! "

"Well, I won't! "

"Nellie Edna won't evah be arrested for talkin' too much," said Aunt Myra good-naturedly.

Cousin Hallie stepped into her car; it sagged visibly. Cousin Dora put her foot on the step. "My, that's a handsome smoke-plant!" said she. Beside Cousin Hallie's car halted another of the same design but perhaps eight years its Junior.

"Can you give us dinner?" called a voice.

"Oh, no!" answered Aunt Myra as though the inquirer had proposed that she join him in some crime. "Oh, no! By no means! Not at this hour! "

The speaker muttered disapproval of Aunt Myra and drove away.

"I know your kind." Aunt Myra addressed the receding car. "Eat everything in sight and grumble at the price and give no tips! "

"'Spose you make a good deal of money from the tourisses," said Cousin Dora again.

Aunt Myra went around the side of the car. "I'll

sit heah, it'll balance bettah. Sam'll have to bring me home, Hallie, 'long 'bout ten o'clock. You treat John Niblett right, Nellie Edna!"

Cousin Hallie strove to start her car, but it produced no welcome and familiar sound. "It'll go by 'n' by," said she, calmly. "It always has."

Cousin Dora leaned out of the car. She looked at Nellie Edna with yearning. "You seen the Half-Moon Cave'ns, Nellie Edna?"

"No," said Nellie Edna, shortly. "Never. I never expect to."

"If you'd come an' teach the school, Lightfoot'd take you through the Half-Moon Cave'ns with a guide. He has the right of way fo' things he done fo' the cave'ns people. He can take you through fo' nothin'."

"I guess she can see the cave'ns now," laughed Aunt Myra. "She has a beau, a rich beau."

Cousin Hallie's car gave a loud snort as if it said, "Well, if I must, I must!"

"Good-bye!" called Cousin Hallie.

"Good-bye!" called Aunt Myra. "You remember what I say. 'A bird in the hand' —"

Cousin Dora uttered no farewell, she only gazed at Nellie Edna. As if drawn by her gaze, Nellie Edna came out the gate and laid her hand on the car.

"You're very kind, Cousin Dora," said she. "But

I couldn't teach. I haven't been to Teachers' College. Your directors wouldn't have me."

"Oh, they'd have you!" shrieked Cousin Dora. "They'd pay all they could. They'd be glad to get you." The car moved, Cousin Dora hung out, her bonnet projecting as though from the bars of a cage. The smoke-tree seemed to wave, the sign to sway. "Glad!" she shrieked above the sound of the engine and again, "Glad!"

Nellie Edna walked slowly up the boardwalk; stepping absently off the edge, she stepped absently back. Nearby a locust began to sing in a tone so shrill that he seemed enraged. Again she sat down in the corner of the step and bent her head upon her hand. Cars passed up and down the Valley, coming from Harper's Ferry, scene of strange fanatic heroism, going to Lexington, cradle of valor, or on to Charlottesville, place of enchantment, or farther still to lofty Blowing Rock or Asheville — her mind neither ran to meet them nor accompanied them on their way. With her eyes closed, she saw about what she had seen with them open. She saw Aunt Myra in bright blue, Cousin Hallie in bright rose, Cousin Dora in shirt waist and skirt. She saw also, less distinctly, a young man in a tan suit and a pink shirt and a bright straw hat.

"Oh, dumb-bell!" said she aloud. "Oh, dumb-bell!"

It was impossible to say whether she addressed the locust, or some absent relative, or the gayly clad young man, or herself.

"I'd like to know some 'orristocracy'" — this word was a rude, disrespectful quotation. "I wouldn't care how rich they'd be, or how lofty, or how proud. I'd like to see something besides an old smoke-tree and a Crimson Rambler! I'd like to be somebody!"

To her sorrowful plaint answered only the tooting of horns.

CHAPTER II

NELLIE EDNA entered the house and ascended the stairs. She passed the door of the parlor, a small, neat room with a floor-covering of matting, and a parlor-suit upholstered in red velvet. The most prominent object was Aunt Myra's dearest treasure, a large Victrola made of bright oak with a lamp permanently attached. The rose-colored shade spread above the machine like an umbrella designed to protect it from possible sunlight or showers.

The room back of the parlor which was intended for a sitting-room, was used in summer as an additional dining-room. The ideals of Aunt Myra were in these matters high, the linen and silver from which aristocracy were served in their homes might have been handsomer, but they could have been no cleaner. In the center of each table was a small vase containing two or three zinnias freshly gathered in the morning. The vases were clear, the water undimmed. One

would know at a glance that in the kitchen as well as the dining-room immaculate neatness prevailed.

Having reached her small room above the front door, Nellie Edna sat down on a chair by the window. The road was visible between the slats of the bowed shutters, but she did not look out. Cars continued on their way, but still her imagination neither met nor followed them. Now and then the sound of a horn reached her inner ear, but she did not heed. Horns had different sounds — some were loud and rude, commanding attention, ordering lesser cars about; others were polite, gentle, considerate, they said "Please!" and "Thank you!" John Niblett, who worked in his father's garage, would have as loud and commanding a horn as he could get.

Car after car passed, the afternoon light began to change; still Nellie Edna sat in her brown linen dress beside the window. John Niblett had not come — perhaps he did not mean to come. The "green-eyed witch" of whom Aunt Myra spoke was a foolish, pretty girl — if he liked that kind of girl, well and good.

"Not a finger will I lift!" said Nellie Edna aloud.
"Not a —"

She interrupted her own remarks to listen to a horn with the long, low, penetrating sound which she admired. It would be on a black car, she guessed,

very handsome, very powerful, the property of one of the class for which Aunt Myra expressed contempt. She turned her head quickly and looked out.

Haste was unnecessary; the car had stopped opposite the house; it stood on the other side of the road exactly as she had imagined it — long and low and black and handsome. It did not stand horizontally, but had a slant to the rear, and this slant was not diagonal, but equal on both sides. Two tires, and not only one, were flat! A colored chauffeur had stepped out, a tall blond young man was following him. Nellie Edna lifted the sash. Her heart began to beat rapidly — they would have to wait fifteen or twenty minutes and she could watch them and listen to them. She had never been so near rich and great people, such as she judged these to be. Turning her chair she sat down, her elbows on the sill, her chin on her hands. She could see in the car one lady and two gentlemen, both the gentlemen gray-haired.

The young man stood for a moment with the chauffeur at the back of the car, then he stepped to the side and opened the door.

"I've been anxious ever since we passed through that glass," said he clearly. "I didn't expect, however, that ruin would be so complete. There's unhappily only one spare tire, and the best thing is for Archer to take one of the punctured tires into Har-

risonburg. He can easily get a lift. We'll ask" — the young man turned toward the shuttered house — "we'll ask whether we may sit here on the porch. The repairs shouldn't take over an hour at most. If these people could" — he looked at the sign above his head — "if they could give us lunch we'd lose no time whatever. I'll go in and inquire."

While the young man came briskly up the boardwalk, Nellie Edna still sat motionless, her elbows on the sill, her chin in her hands. He passed out of her area of vision and ascended the porch steps, then the brisk tap of his heels could be heard on the porch floor. He knocked with the rapidity of one perturbed or in haste, and the firmness of one accustomed to having his way. When he began to rap, Nellie Edna closed her lips and rose. She was pale; she was in truth more excited than she had ever been in her life. Moving automatically, she went down the steps.

"Good afternoon." The young man elided no *r's*; he was from what Aunt Myra called the "No'th." "We've had an accident at your door. I have some friends here whom I've brought a long way to see the caverns. May we sit on your pleasant porch until our chauffeur brings back our tire?"

Nellie Edna almost said "Sure!" In the nick of time she had a mental vision of Aunt Myra swinging back and forth in her rocking-chair, her toes touch-

ing the floor at each swing. "Indeed you may!" said she instead, with a blush. "Shall I bring another chair?"

"I think there are enough."

"Perhaps you'd rather come inside," invited Nellie Edna. "It's cooler."

The young man smiled at Nellie Edna. Her brown eyes were really beautiful when you looked straight into them; so also were the agate eyes of the stranger. "Will you help me in a very embarrassing situation?" he asked.

A wave of color covered Nellie Edna's cheeks. "If I can!"

"These are celebrated people I have with me," said he. "The lady is Miss Alice Allen of New York, who usually lives in France and who was decorated by the French and English governments for her services during the war. She's a very great and very charming lady. One of the gentlemen is General Harrod of the British General Staff, the other is Professor Abernethy of the University of Virginia. We hoped to get to Harrisonburg for lunch, but we couldn't make it, and we now have punctures in two new tires. Can you, will you, give us lunch while we wait?"

For an instant Nellie Edna looked as though she had no mind whatever. "I can give you cold chicken

and cold ham and rolls and dessert," she said at last, with a sort of cool dignity, like hardened lava on a seething volcano.

"And iced coffee?"

"Yes," answered Nellie Edna. "And while the coffee boils I can boil corn on the cob. It's husked and ready."

The young man laughed delightedly. "I'd like to see General Harrod struggling with corn on the cob! I'll bring them in." He turned away and then back. "You're not alone, are you?"

"I am," said Nellie Edna. "But that's nothing! If you wanted roast turkey, it would be different."

"Yes," agreed the young man, "it would! Perhaps I can help you."

"That isn't necessary. Bring your friends in, and tell them to make themselves at home."

Nellie Edna walked back through the hall. Her second step was twice as fast as her first, her third twice as fast as the second. She reached the kitchen table with a slide. There she stood blinking, and looking about as though she were in a strange place. She laid her hand on top of her head. "Is this me?" said she aloud. The touch seemed to establish an active current in her brain. The oil stove, accustomed to emergencies, took on a familiar air, the refrigerator became a friend. "This is I!" said she with distinct

emphasis on the pronoun. "And I'm going to see a General and a great and charming lady!"

Voices sounded in the hall, a woman's laugh, a man's in answer; she heard them only as an accompaniment to her flying about. She felt no doubt of herself; often while Aunt Myra sat and talked to tourists who were willing to listen, she prepared the meals. She heard the voices again — the words did not sound natural, was it because these people spoke English differently, or was their language foreign? The skin on her cheeks pricked.

"Perhaps I shall hear French spoken!"

The coffee bubbled in the percolater, the water bubbled round the corn. The ham was ready sliced, the chicken was fried in convenient sections, the table was ready. Nellie Edna had already put on a clean white apron; when a drop of coffee fell upon it she discarded it for another. She walked toward the parlor; her knees were weak and she put her hand against the jamb of the door. The parlor was filled, it seemed to her, with rising figures of men among whom the little figure of a lady was lost.

"This is Miss Allen," said the young man. "This is Professor Abernethy. This is General Harrod. My name is Beekman."

Nellie Edna, who had never made a bow, made a bow now. Greetings stumbled to her lips — "Glad

to meet you." "Pleased to make your acquaintance." Unable to choose the more elegant, she spoke directly to the point. "Lunch is ready."

In the dining-room she saw her guests plainly. General Harrod must be seventy years old, he was more than six feet tall, straight as a post, and his skin was like leather — one could not imagine it ever becoming white. Professor Abernethy was short, with dark gray hair, a small pointed beard and smiling eyes. Nellie Edna looked last at Miss Allen, looked with hesitancy as though the sight of Miss Allen might be blinding. But Miss Allen was a little, plainly dressed lady whose age might be sixty at least. She had taken off her hat and her straight gray hair was smoothly braided; she wore no ornaments except a cameo on her black dress. There were no beads round her neck, there were no rings upon her hands.

"If that's a great and charming lady," said Nellie Edna to herself, "then there's hope for me!"

She stepped out to the kitchen and returned with a platter of steaming corn. Miss Allen helped herself; she lifted her eyes to the eyes of Nellie Edna.

"My dear," said she. "You've been very kind to us. I haven't seen or tasted corn on the cob for thirty years."

Nellie Edna almost dropped the platter. Miss Allen's voice was like no voice she had ever heard;

she understood for the first time that voices, like automobile horns, might be different one from the other. There was Aunt Myra's, soft, flat, and drawling; there was Cousin Dora's, soft, rich and drawling; there was — while her thoughts wandered the platter trembled in the balance. She seized it in a firmer grasp.

"I'm glad I struck the right thing," she said nervously, her voice like Aunt Myra's. In her heart she said, "There's no hope for me in a million years!"

"Corn on the cob!" repeated General Harrod. "I've seen it eaten, but I've never tried to eat it."

"We'll show you," said young Beekman. His spirits rose even higher, he looked at Nellie Edna as though he and she had part in a delightful conspiracy. "You haven't told us your name."

"My name" — Nellie Edna flushed, then she lifted her red head higher — "My name is Nellie Edna Strickhouser." "And you may make the best of it!" said she in her heart. "Strickhouser" had an uncouth sound.

"Strickhouser!" Into the word General Harrod's inflections put music. "That's not a Virginia name."

"Yes, it is!" Professor Abernethy took it upon himself to answer. He looked at Nellie Edna smilingly. "There's a volume of history in that name. Fifty years before your Spottswood led his Knights

of the Golden Horseshoe to look down into the Valley a German explored it and made a map of it. When its fertility became known, Germans poured down from Maryland and Pennsylvania. The population was and is for the most part German — isn't that so?" Dr. Abernethy looked at Nellie Edna for confirmation.

"I guess it is," she answered, growing red. "Hypocrite!" said she to herself. "You know nothing about it!"

"We're new in this country," said Beekman, to General Harrod. "We have no Roman ruins as you have. But we have Indian remains. Not far to the north are mounds filled with the skeletons of a tribe, probably exterminated in one swoop by their enemies."

General Harrod turned to look at Beekman. "Delightful!" said he. "Shall we see any mounds?"

"If you stay long enough, we'll show you everything."

"We have many mineral springs of medical repute," said Abernethy. "Sulphur and chalybeate and alum and iron, and a few thermal springs. Some have been exceedingly profitable to their proprietors."

"You must eat your corn, General Harrod," said Miss Allen. "Put your good manners in your pocket and begin. You gnaw. See? Like this."

"Extraordin'ry!" General Harrod lifted his cob, regarded it as though it might explode in his face, and took a bite. "Extraordin'ry!" said he with a different inflection.

"Do you mean extraordinarily good?" laughed Miss Allen.

"I do, indeed!"

Nellie Edna served more corn and more chicken, then she changed the plates and brought sliced peaches. She moved as in a dream. Miss Allen spoke at length — caves had been opened in France; it was astonishing that experts could not agree as to whether they were authentic discoveries or a hoax. She used French words, at least Nellie Edna guessed them to be French. She spoke smoothly, as only the preacher spoke. When her friends came again to France, they would make an expedition like this.

"A great man your General Jackson," said General Harrod. "Jackson and Lee were the military geniuses of your war."

"We go over Jackson's line," said Abernethy. "This valley was as familiar to him as the palm of his hand."

"Eventually it was cleaned out like the palm of one's hand, wasn't it?" said Miss Allen.

"It was said that a crow would have had to bring his food into it," answered Abernethy. "It was the

scene of two of the most heroic exploits of the war — the charge of the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute in May, '64, and Sheridan's ride in October. The cadets passed here; at the end of their three-day march they had a brief rest, then they were placed in line, a battalion of them — as young as fourteen, none over twenty. They held their position for three hours, then they charged across the open and broke the Federal line. Poor, slaughtered children!"

Nellie Edna stood behind General Harrod's chair. Beekman was looking at Miss Allen — tears, she realized, were in Miss Allen's eyes.

"And your caverns?" said Miss Allen. "How were they discovered?"

"A boy chased a rabbit into one," explained Abernethy. "Another was discovered in blasting. Every boy in the Valley dreams of finding a cave. The Valley is honeycombed."

"Do they dress them up a bit?" inquired Harrod. "Excavate a bit here, and take out rocks there?"

"I suppose they do; otherwise you couldn't get about."

"Was any use made of them during the Civil War?" inquired Harrod.

"Not much," answered Abernethy. "A few skulkers might have hidden there when the conscript officers came round."

Beekman pushed back his chair. "If they didn't fix them up, it wouldn't be safe for us to go in. Not long ago in Kentucky a reckless explorer was caught. We made a ballad about it. It begins:

*Oh, come all ye young people,
And listen while I tell,
The fate of Elmer Moxley,
A lad we all know well.*

Shall I sing it?"

"No, you shall not!" said Miss Allen. "At least not until we've been in and out."

"I hear Archer's horn," said Beekman.

Miss Allen held out her hand to Nellie Edna. "You've made us very happy and comfortable," said she. "You must let me whisper something to you." She leaned forward. "Some day an artist will wish to paint your lovely hair."

"Oh, I guess not!" said Nellie Edna, astonished and pale.

"And that golden brown dress is right, exactly right. Clearly you have feeling for color."

General Harrod bowed deeply. "You have given me a pleasant memory to carry with me. I congratulate you upon living on the scene of so much that is noble and heroic."

Young Beekman lingered last of all. He stood by the table with his bill-fold in his hand. "You got me out of a bad hole," said he. "To have tires go flat under one's distinguished guests is not pleasant. Thanks to you we've lost no time; indeed we've gained it, for we couldn't have been served so well anywhere else in the whole Valley of Virginia, I'm sure of that." He put a bill into Nellie Edna's hand. "There, and thank you."

"I haven't enough change," said Nellie Edna. "The charge is two dollars, and this is ten!"

"There's no change, not a penny." Beekman put the bill-fold back into his pocket with one hand while with the other he waved off further protest.

"It's too much!" The bill in her hand, Nellie Edna followed him through the hall. Through the door could be seen the smoke-tree and the Crimson Rambler and the long car and going down the boardwalk Miss Allen and General Harrod. Nellie Edna was dazed; the patrons of Aunt Myra's house were either those who could not afford to make presents, or else those who, being able to afford, lacked inclination to give.

"That's a most beautiful *Rhus cotinus*" — Beekman waved his hand toward the smoke-tree. "I've never seen one larger or finer. I'm glad you haven't trimmed it. If I ever" — he stepped out to the



*Wash My Dishes — after That There's no Telling
What I'll Do*



porch — "If I ever get back into this neighborhood, I'm coming to find you." He held out his hand. "Good luck!"

"Thank you," said Nellie Edna. "What did you call that bush?"

"*Rhus cotinus* of the *Anacardiaceæ* or Cashew family," said Beekman smiling. "Related to the sumacs. Want me to write it for you?"

"I do."

Beekman printed the name on a leaf from a pad which he took from his pocket. On the porch waited Abernethy.

"You haven't visited as many wayside restaurants as I have, Miss Strickhouser, and therefore you can't estimate the attractiveness of your own. These other people go away, but I stay at Charlottesville. Perhaps sometime I can do you a favor. Good-bye and good luck!"

Tears smarted in Nellie Edna's eyes. "I'm not sure about the luck!"

"You make your own luck," said Abernethy. "You're too young to talk about not having luck! You're not through with your schooling, are you?"

"I thought I was," said Nellie Edna with grim humor. "I thought I knew everything."

"And you've found out you don't?" laughed Ab-

ernethy. "Fortunately you've found out in good time. If I were you, I'd go to college."

"To college!"

Abernethy ran down the steps. "Why not?" said he.

The chauffeur started the engine, the car moved, slowly, then faster. From the seat beside the chauffeur a hand waved, at the rear window another. Nellie Edna sat down on the upper step, her narrowed eyes looking over the clipped lawn. It was she who had clipped it, the center with a lawn-mower, the edges with scissors.

"She thinks an artist will want to paint my red hair!" said she aloud with awe. "Clearly, I have 'feeling for color'!"

"He thinks I should be proud to live in this wonderful place!" She looked at the lawn, at the sky, finally at the Crimson Rambler and the smoke-tree. "The *Rhus cotinus* of the *Anacardiaceæ* or Cashew family," said she, consulting the paper in her hand. "Related to the sumacs." She looked at the crumpled bill. "Ten dollars!"

Her mind returned to Miss Allen, dwelt upon General Harrod. "Tomorrow I'll find out about him somehow. Oh, what a dumb-bell!" There was no doubt now whom she meant. She thought again of Beekman. "The *Rhus cotinus*!" The words seemed

to have some magic meaning. Her thoughts reached at last their intended goal, which was Professor Ab-nernethy. "You make your own luck," said he. At last she rose and turned to enter the house.

"I'll wash my dishes," she planned in a daze. "After that there's no telling what I'll do."

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CHAPTER III

STILL dazed, Nellie Edna paused inside the front door, and put the ten-dollar bill and the small paper together into her bosom. She laid her hand on the newel-post and for a long time stood motionless and with bent head, her eyes apparently fixed upon the table in the dining-room where her guests had sat, but fixed in reality upon nothing so tangible. At last, uttering a sigh, she proceeded toward the table. She uttered in addition a few words—she was about to say again “dumb-bell”; instead she used a more elegant equivalent, “Ignoramus!”

In the dining-room she paused again, and again remained standing, her hand on the back of the chair which had been General Harrod’s. Looking across at the chair which had been Miss Allen’s, she bowed. “Miss Strickhouser,” said she with the inflections of General Harrod. “Some day an artist will wish to paint your beautiful hair,” said she in the voice and manner of Miss Allen. She gave her head a toss.

"Clearly you have feeling for color!" — she laughed a sharp, light, little laugh — "whatever that may mean!"

Still for a long time she gazed upon the disorderly table. At last, in imitation of Beekman, she drew back a chair. "He moved" — it was a great pity that no one was present to enjoy the motions and inflections of Nellie Edna — "he moved with the grace of one gliding in the dance."

Reaching out an uncertain hand, she gathered the glasses and carried them into the kitchen. The kitchen, like the dining-room, was growing dim, even though it was on the side of the house where the light lingered last of all. Standing by the table, she remained motionless for at least five minutes, then she returned to the dining-room with a tray. There again she stood still. "Perhaps there's time yet," said she.

As though the time left for whatever she had decided to do were but a few minutes, she set furiously to work. She cleared the table and washed the dishes; descending into the cellar, she busied herself in some mysterious fashion; then, ascending, went into an outer kitchen and laid a fire in a stove which was used for washing. As she moved rapidly about, she repeated fragments of sentences, or imitated remembered details of behavior. Several times she bowed,

once with the dishcloth in her hand, once with the tea-towel, once as she entered the dim out-kitchen.

Finishing with the fall of darkness, she went through the house, opening windows and shutters, then stepping out on the porch she sat down in her corner. Before her in the eastern sky there was a rosy glow—the moon was rising. To the north there was a different and more spectacular light, across the sky moved the long shaft from a powerful searchlight on the roof of a bank in Harrisonburg. A breeze was rising, it blew the tendril of a Virginia Creeper across her cheek, then across her nose; impatiently she brushed it away but it returned to its tickling. At last with a vague feeling of irritation she let it remain.

Cars continued to pass, some with loud rude horns, some with deep booming horns, none with low musical horns. The moon rose above the horizon and shone fully upon her, illuminating her red hair, her brown dress, her white apron. She seldom appeared at the front of the house wearing an apron; now, in the light which was growing each moment brighter, the apron was conspicuous.

She did not look at the moon or at the searchlight, she looked down at the boardwalk. When a car stopped at the gate she did not observe it, and when

a sharp horn blew a loud blast she looked up startled. The car was new and shining, from it stepped a jaunty young man who came through the gate and up the path. She looked at him surprised, striving to clear her eyes by blinking.

"Oh!" she said to herself at last. "Oh, yes!"

Before the exclamation had died away the young man stood before her. His suit had the color of caramel ice-cream, his shirt the color of the same viand flavored with synthetic strawberry. She was no more surprised than he — a brown linen dress and a white apron did not compose the attire which John Niblett expected on a young lady who at nine o'clock in the evening had sat for some time awaiting his arrival. Perhaps Nellie Edna was cross — if so, she had lost the only quality which made her attractive in his eyes.

"Gee, it's hot!" said he as he fanned himself with his hat. "Come on, kid, let's go for a ride. I got my new bus at the gate."

Nellie Edna's rejoinder was abrupt, not to say rude. "No," said she and stopped. Then she added blushing, "Thank you all the same."

John came closer. "What's eating you?" he asked.

"Eating me?" Nellie Edna knew perfectly well what was eating her; it was hatred of John Niblett. She hated another person — herself for once having

had John Niblett's arm round her. She felt also an undefined, undefinable strange wild woe.

"Yes, 'eating you.' Better come down off your perch, and go for a ride."

"I don't care to go riding at this hour."

"I suppose you're mad because I didn't come," said John frankly.

"No," said Nellie Edna with equal frankness. "I forgot you were coming."

John straightened his shoulders—it was, as Aunt Myra said, touch and go with him. "It seems you like your own company best."

"I do," answered Nellie Edna briefly.

"Then have it."

John walked down the boardwalk, his shoes creaking angrily. He got into his car; his horn, warning all within hearing that he meant to make a short turn in the middle of the road, had a contemptuous sound.

Nellie Edna rose to a standing position. John Niblett had vanished, there was no reason now to bid him farewell, but apparently she wished to say farewell even though he was gone. She looked toward the north where together he and Harrisonburg were invisible beneath the moving radius of light.

"Good-bye," said she in a loud tone. "Good-bye, forever!"

She remained standing, her eyes fixed on some un-

seen object beneath the moving shaft. At last she sat down, her eyes still turned toward Harrisonburg as though she feared to lose sight of the object at which she gazed. It couldn't be John Niblett unless, departed, he became suddenly precious. Her gaze widened and grew more intent, the breeze began to blow, unnoticed the tendril fingered her smooth cheek. What she saw was not the light, not the building which was its pivot, not the town itself; least of all John Niblett. What she saw was a campus, a group of buildings, and young people going in and out.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS ten o'clock, and Nellie Edna sat in the corner of the upper step of the porch. The tendril still touched her, now on the cheek, now on the nose; sometimes she brushed it impatiently away, more often she absently endured its tickling. The moon was no longer rosy, but clear yellow; the searchlight still flashed across the sky as though in defiance of the moon. To the south and west there was distant lightning; intermittently it added another degree to the brightness of the night.

Still Nellie Edna looked toward Harrisonburg. Still what she saw was not the light, not the town itself; least of all John Niblett. What she saw was a group of buildings, a campus, young people going back and forth.

"I could teach one year on Stony Man," said she. "Then I could go to Summer School, then I could get a better place." She counted — "one year, two, three." Again she repeated the words of

Professor Abernethy. "You make," said he, "your own luck."

Still cars passed north and south, though now their number was diminishing. At ten o'clock came a rattling sound and a hoarse bark, and Cousin Sam's car stopped at the gate. A large figure stepped out — that was Aunt Myra. She stood whispering to someone within, then with a slow step she came up the boardwalk. Midway she turned and looked back — again Cousin Sam's car was slow to start.

"I'll give you a full repo't," she called. "I guess she's gone to bed."

"I haven't gone to bed," said Nellie Edna in her crisp way. "I'm right here on the porch."

Aunt Myra drew near; she did not, however, ascend to the rocking-chair in which she took so much comfort; she sank down beside Nellie Edna on the step. The tendril, swayed by her passing, brushed Nellie Edna's eye, and she swept it impatiently away with her handkerchief.

"Don't cry, Nellie Edna!" advised Aunt Myra, tenderly. "No man's worth it, least of all a Niblett. Take it from me!"

"I'm not crying," protested Nellie Edna. "Why in the world should I cry?"

"Did that scoundrel come?"

Nellie Edna blinked. John Niblett was less real

than Stonewall Jackson, which was saying a good deal.

"What scoundrel?"

"You know who I mean, and I can tell you why he didn't come," said Aunt Myra furiously. "Sam's engine got hot and we had to stop at Fickes's for watah. His engine leaks; everything Sam has leaks. On Fickes's porch sat John Niblett, big as life and bold as could be."

"He did?"

Aunt Myra was annoyed — Nellie Edna had no call to pretend before her. "He sat in the swing with Tryphena," said she as though she flung a hand grenade.

"Rather Tryphena than I," replied Nellie Edna. "I'm very tired of John Niblett."

Through the darkness Aunt Myra bent upon her niece an incredulous and pitying gaze.

"I took in four people for lunch," went on Nellie Edna.

Aunt Myra had at bottom a kind heart. "Then I tell you what I want you to do — I want you to keep the money and buy some stylish clothes."

"They paid me ten dollars."

"Ten dollahs! What on earth? What kind of people were they?" Aunt Myra did not wait to have her questions answered. "What they gave you, you

keep. Get new clothes. Who knows, perhaps you can still tear him out of her clutches. He doesn't act quick, we know that."

"She may have him."

Aunt Myra mistook indifference for despair. "I saw the funnies in the Richmond Sunday papah," said she to enliven Nellie Edna. "They're two days ahead of our papahs. The bank robbahs captured Orphan Annie and took her off in a cah for one thing, and Cap Stubbs and his Gran'ma got home in the middle of the night for anothah."

Nellie Edna rose. There was about her a strange new air, she held herself erect, she seemed in some queer way to have become larger, more imposing.

"You've still got your old workin' dress on!" gasped Aunt Myra. "An' your apron! What on earth, Nellie Edna?"

Nellie Edna smiled a little secret smile. She heard secret words — "the golden brown is right, exactly right."

"These were very wonderful people who were here," she said. "They had two flat tires and they stopped opposite the gate."

"Some old rubbah, I'll say!" commented Aunt Myra.

"They had run through glass," explained Nellie

Edna. "One was a Miss Allen who lived in France during the war. One was a General, an Englishman. One was a young man from New York. They were his company and he paid me the ten dollars. One was a professor at Charlottesville."

"I'm surprised they could put up with our ways!"

"They did, they liked them."

"I'll bet John Niblett came by and seen them here!" cried Aunt Myra. "If you gave him up to feed the orristocracy you made a great mistake, Nellie Edna, ten dollahs or no ten dollahs."

Nellie Edna had her own grenade.

"I'm going to Cousin Dora Briscoe's to teach the school," she said. "Then I'm going to the Teachers' College, then I'm going to the real college. Summers I'll help you."

"What!" cried Aunt Myra.

Nellie Edna repeated her announcement. She saw Professor Abernethy's keen and smiling eyes.

"To teach the Briscoes' school!" cried Aunt Myra. "To Stony Man Mountain! Why, Nellie Edna! You should see Lightfoot Briscoe; beside him Dora's a lady. He looks — he looks like a walrus, Nellie Edna! He's got no education. And them boys — named for the orristocracy, Dobie an' Stonewall an' Woodfill, indeed! I'll bet they're wild as the ass's colt. There's snow on Stony Man from early autumn,

an' in the spring you're hemmed in till May. My soul, Nellie Edna! "

"Were you ever there?" asked Nellie Edna.

"No," said Aunt Myra. "But look at Dora Briscoe. Listen to her, talkin' about her cave'ns! "

"I thought she was pretty smart for what she has."

"Smaht! Now, listen to me, Nellie Edna. Hope isn't lost. You get new clothes with your ten dollahs. I ask you, what can be in a man who takes to Tryphena Fickes! If I had my hands on her, I'd choke her good an' propah, believe me! "

"You needn't choke her for my sake," said Nellie Edna coolly. "I tell you how it is, Aunt Myra. I've waked up. Here I am sixteen years old, living here since I was born. Here were these people, one from France, one from England, one from New York. What did they talk about — England, France, New York? They talked about this place." Stepping to the boardwalk, Nellie Edna gesticulated like Cousin Dora, but she seemed to be pointing no farther than the clipped lawn. "They talked about the mountains and Stonewall Jackson and the V. M. I., and the boys that went out to fight, and the thermal springs and the aluminum springs and some other springs I can't pronounce. Could I talk with them? Needless to ask — I could not! Do you know what the name of that bush is out there?" Nellie Edna was facing

Aunt Myra, her pointing hand went round behind her back. "That's no smoke-tree, that's a *Rhus cotinus* of the *Anacardiaceæ* or Cashew family, related to the sumacs."

"My land!" cried Aunt Myra. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Now you're talking!" went on Nellie Edna in a hysterical tone. "I haven't lost my mind. I've found it and I'm going to use it. You talk about the aristocracy, Aunt Myra! — that's exactly what I'm going to be. The aristocracy are different from us because they use their minds. They're proud, they have a right to be. When I know a *Rhus cotinus* is a smoke-tree, when I know the campaigns of Stonewall Jackson from those of General Lee, then I'll be proud too. I'm going to improve my mind and nothing is to stand in my way, nothing, no snows, or walruses. If I can get that school, I may well be thankful."

In the ensuing pause Aunt Myra said again, "My land!"

"I've put the wash to soak," said Nellie Edna. "Good night."

Nellie Edna walked up the steps and across the porch and into the house and upstairs. There she undressed and bathed and opened her windows and shutters wide and lay down on her bed. The search-

light flamed across the sky, tracing a noble arc against the blackness. Great words went through her mind. "Hypothesis" — that was used by General Harrod; something was, he said, "not a credible hypothesis." "Idiosyncrasy" — that was used by Miss Allen. Nellie Edna had spelled the word in school, but she had never expected to hear it used. She came back at last to "*Rhus cotinus*," "*Anacardiaceæ*," "Cashew" — what strange and winning sounds!

Below stairs sat Aunt Myra. She always played herself into a sleepy state with a record, and late though it was she needed a record desperately. The one she selected from a large number equally poor in quality matched the gloom and anxiety of her thoughts; it was the song which young Beekman had offered to sing. She owned no soft needles and never by any chance did she close the doors of the sound-box. The loud voice of the tenor was exaggerated as though by an amplifier:

*How sad, how sad the story,
It fills our eyes with tears;
Its memories too will linger,
For many, many years.*

Nellie Edna covered her ears with her hands.

"I'll live on a mountain," said she to herself. "And

visit a cavern. That will be a start toward seeing something besides what I've seen since I was born. Most important, I'll be earning money. I'll save every penny. I'll put up with everything, and morning and night I'll think of my advancement."

Tentatively she removed her hands from her ears, then put them back. The third or fourth of many stanzas was beginning:

Oh, how the news did travel!
Oh, how the news did go!
It traveled through the papers,
And over the radio.

Aunt Myra adjusted the needle and came upstairs. She walked heavily, shaking her head gloomily with each step.

"Nellie Edna," said she, "are you asleep?"

Nellie Edna made no answer. By and by the music stopped. Aunt Myra had not set the automatic stopping device accurately, the old cat died slowly, the high note of the singer sinking from a shriek to a long dismal groan. Aunt Myra stepped again to Nellie Edna's door.

"I've had my own disappointments, Nellie Edna," said she. "I can undastand."

"It's not a disappointment to lose John Niblett, if that's what you mean!" declared Nellie Edna.

Uttering an incredulous sigh, Aunt Myra retired to her room.

"Tell that to somebody besides me!" said she in a sorrowful undertone.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS early in the afternoon of August thirty-first, and the aspect of the small white house was almost unchanged. The feathery flowers of the smoke-tree had turned a dull grayish yellow; the Crimson Rambler, thanks to the frequent showers of a wet season, had put out long shoots. The grass was green; one would have said that it had been cut and clipped and swept within a few hours, and such was the case. The Virginia Creeper shrouded the porch a little more thoroughly and the bowed shutters darkened and cooled the interior of the house. The day was warm, but not bright like that upon which Mr. Beekman and his friends had visited the Valley. Clouds veiled the sun, dulling its light, but did not appear to modify its heat. The clouds were thickening, and they seemed also to be sinking lower upon the earth.

In her small room over the front hall stood Nellie Edna. She wore a dress of golden brown pongee, stockings of golden brown, and brown shoes, and she

was at this moment looking into the glass and covering her hair with a small felt hat of golden brown. Her outfit was inexpensive and, as far as it could be, home-made, but it was, as Miss Allen would have said "right." During the six weeks which had passed she had looked frequently into the mirror, and the occupation had done her no harm. She had always thought herself extremely plain; now she believed herself to be tolerable to the eye, and this conviction brought with it a pleasant self-confidence.

"If you're only fairly good-looking you can forget yourself," said she, and having concluded her inspection, she turned and regarded the room.

She glanced at the bed — the spread lay upon the mattress with no intervening sheets and blankets. She looked at the bureau — upon it nought remained but a cover, an ancient pin-cushion covered with beads, and two red glass bottles. Opening the drawers of the bureau she glanced in — they were, as she knew, empty, except for paper linings; the closet was likewise empty. All the rooms in Aunt Myra's house, except Aunt Myra's own, were now prepared for tourists. On a chair stood a small satchel; beside it on the floor a large suitcase.

From the lower floor came mournful sounds. On one of Aunt Myra's records a shrill and powerful soprano sang, "God be with you till we meet again"

— this Aunt Myra considered an appropriate valedictory for her niece. The double *e* was prolonged to agonized length, until it ceased to be a musical tone and became a squeal. Sometimes Aunt Myra joined in, singing an octave below the pitch of the record and a little off key.

Lifting her heavy suitcase, Nellie Edna went down the stairs, and having carried it to the porch returned for her lighter bag. Now, descending more slowly, she looked at the banister, the wallpaper, the carpet. She walked out to the dining-room and gazed at the neat tables, and returning glanced into the parlor. Under the rose-colored parasol Aunt Myra had again set the mechanism of the Victrola to stop of its own accord and herself had repaired to the porch. The stop device was again not accurately adjusted; the old cat, caught on the double *e*, died with wildest wails. Nellie Edna blinked away tears.

Stepping out to the porch she found Aunt Myra in her rocking-chair. Her dress was a becoming pink, her stockings were pink, her beads were pink, her shoes were white — there was something very engaging about Aunt Myra in spite of her limitations. She had hopes of some lonely and opulent gentleman who, stopping for dinner or supper, would wish forever to remain or to carry her with him. It was the disappointment of these hopes to which she had alluded

to Nellie Edna; it was astonishing that they had never been realized.

She looked at Nellie Edna mournfully. "I'll give you till Christmas," said she. Touching the floor with her toes, she swung far back, then forward.

"I hope I can hold out longer than that." Perched on the arm of a chair Nellie Edna steadied her voice. "From Christmas till May isn't long."

"But that's the ha'd time," said Aunt Myra, taking another backward spring. "Lightfoot's pure mountaineer, that's what he is, and Dora she's grew like him. He has a long yellow mustache on each side — that's what makes him look like a walrus" — again Aunt Myra flung herself backward — "I expect the children's even more out-of-the-world. I expect they all smoke and chew. I shouldn't be surprised if they drink. The mountaineers" — this new possibility suggesting itself to Aunt Myra gave her undeniable satisfaction — "the mountaineers are mostly bottleggahs. Or worse."

"I don't believe Cousin Dora would allow bootlegging."

"How could she stop it?" Aunt Myra gave herself another push, so vigorous that for a second her balance was imperiled. "Now there's two things to remember: in the first place this is your home, and you're welcome back at any minute, and in the second place,

you can't evah say I didn't wahn you not to go, and advise you to stay."

"I'll remember," promised Nellie Edna. In spite of all her ambitious resolutions tears threatened once more. They were dried by Aunt Myra's next observation.

"It's my duty to say a pahtin' word about John Niblett, Nellie Edna. I've heard things about him and I know he was well lost. But there are more in the world. The trouble is you won't find 'em on Stony Man Mountain."

"I'm not looking for any others."

"And if you think your rich young man with the big black limousine is comin' back, you're mistaken there too. It's touch an' go with such."

"I don't expect him to come back. I'm not interested in young men, Aunt Myra; I'm interested in myself, in improving my mind."

"It's goin' to rain," prophesied Aunt Myra, as though this were a logical rejoinder. "The woods is bad enough in cheerful weathah, but in the rain—good night! And don't expect Lightfoot Briscoe to fetch you in a cah; he'll fetch you in a horse and buggy with the blind staggahs."

Nellie Edna looked toward the south and in spite of herself she shivered. "It's time for the bus. You might send me the newspapers, Aunt Myra."

"I intend to do that." Aunt Myra rose. "You leave the heavy satchel be. Orphan Annie'll be out of the hands of the bank robbahs long before you'll be in civilization, an' deah knows what Cap Spubbs and his Gran'ma'll be up to. I have an idea they'll be off to Niagara Falls next." Refusing all help Cousin Myra staggered down the steps to the boardwalk. "Just so you ain't tore to bits!" she said, her tone both violent and affectionate.

"Who will tear me to bits?" asked Nellie Edna.

"Have you nevah heard how the big boys lock the teachah out?" asked Aunt Myra. "How they come to school only to devil the teachah? How they torture the young ones? How they barricade themselves in the schoolhouse and the teachah has to break his way in? How they knock the stovepipe down and send soot flying all about? How they carry filth into the school-room?"

"I never heard any of those things," said Nellie Edna, growing pale.

"You went to a civilized school," said Aunt Myra. "In the mountain they do all those things."

"I won't be torn to bits, I'm sure of that." Nellie Edna followed down the boardwalk with her light bag. "Think of it, Aunt Myra, up this very road went those poor V. M. I. boys, marching for three days."

"They were tore to bits," said Aunt Myra gloomily. "I don't like to think of such unpleasant things. It's a great pity you didn't get a brown satchel instead of a black one. There's one more thing — when you get up there, an' see the poor way they live, you'll be tempted to give presents. Don't do it! Don't give unless you receive in return. That's the only way to get along in this world. I've found that out."

"All right," promised Nellie Edna.

The huge bus came round the curve and Aunt Myra waved her hand. It stopped where the long black car had stopped, and the driver sprang down.

"Travelin'?"

"Seems like it!" Nellie Edna's spirits took a leap upward. "Newmarket."

The driver put the heavy bag in the rack on the roof of the car, Nellie Edna paid her fare, Aunt Myra embraced her fervently.

"Remembah the three things I told you! An' if any young desperadoes come, show from the first that you're boss."

"I will!" promised Nellie Edna.

She climbed aboard and sat down near the back. The bus started, moving lumberingly, then more swiftly.

"Good-bye!" shrieked Aunt Myra. As far as

Nellie Edna could see she stood at the gate and waved her hand.

Having rounded the curve which shut out the white house, Nellie Edna opened her satchel and took from a pocket a handful of literature. There was a small sheet of paper upon which was printed the lengthy botanical name of the smoke-tree, there was an illustrated folder left on the parlor table by a tourist, describing the University of Virginia. The names of the heads of departments were listed and opposite the name of Professor Abernethy, Nellie Edna had placed a pencil check. There was a clipping from a Charlottesville paper, come by the same happy accident into her hands. It said:

The University has had distinguished guests. Arthur Beekman, of the class of 1918, brought with him from New York General Harrod of the British General Staff and Miss Alice Allen of an old and historic family, herself famous for her war work in France. She is also famous for her work as an artist, especially for her portraits of children, some of which are hung in foreign galleries. The party visited the Shenandoah Valley and the Half-Moon Caverns in company with Professor Abernethy. General Harrod consented to a brief interview in which he

spoke with profound respect of the military genius of Generals Lee and Jackson.

The final exhibit in Nellie Edna's collection was another illustrated folder, an advertisement of the caverns with a description of each town along the Valley Pike. "Near Harrisonburg," she read, "Stonewall Jackson, retreating from Harper's Ferry, turned upon the Union armies and defeated Shields, first at Cross Keys, and the following day at Port Republic. Before the white man looked upon the beauties of the broad and fertile Valley, Indian braves held their savage councils near Newmarket. Before —"

She returned the folders to her bag — a hundred times had indifferent tourists left copies of this very pamphlet on the parlor table or the porch. She had looked at the pictures, but she had not read the descriptions. Now, knowing them by heart, she did not need to read them. Newmarket was the terminus of her journey, but she could recite all that had happened as far as Harper's Ferry.

"'See America first' is right," said she. "And when I've seen these places I'm going to see the world."

Newmarket was a small, pleasant, but unimposing town, and at four o'clock when the bus drew up it

seemed asleep. The cars of tourists passed steadily, but the natives were for the most part invisible. A few men sat idly on a bench before the hardware store, a few dogs and cats lay as if dead on porches or steps, a few horses, attached to ancient buggies, switched their ears and tails; otherwise there was no life or motion. Nearby waited another conveyance, a small enclosed car on whose side were painted the words "Bus for Sperryville." It was clear that few passengers were expected. For the luggage of those who should come a rack was improvised on the roof.

The large bus upon which Nellie Edna traveled came to a stop, and the driver stepped down and handed her heavy satchel to a middle-aged man who rose from the bench and came forward.

"That all you got?" he inquired in a humorous undertone.

"A good deal better than nothing," replied the young man. He mounted to his seat, blew his horn and was off in a minute.

The chauffeur of the small bus showed no such haste. Having opened the door for Nellie Edna and stowed her luggage away, he stood talking to the idlers.

"It's goin' to rain before you git to the caverns," said one.

"I'll bet it'll rain before you git to the gas-station," prophesied another.

"I'll bet it's going to rain a week," said the bus driver gloomily. "We ain't had no rainy season this year. Well, I guess I better start. How far you goin', Sister?"

"To Mr. Briscoe's," answered Nellie Edna. "Mr. Lightfoot Briscoe's."

"You are!"

"I'm going to teach the school. Mr. Briscoe's to meet me, but I don't know just where."

"I know where." The driver stepped to his seat. "He'll meet you. He'll be waitin' by the road. I know him. His wife, she traveled with me a couple o' weeks back. Tall. A good talker."

"Yes," said Nellie Edna. "She visited my aunt."

"Who is your aunt?"

"Mrs. Myra Strickhouser."

"Oh, yes, I heard tell of her. Lives at Lacey Springs, don't she?"

"No, she doesn't," said Nellie Edna. "She lives below Harrisonburg."

Not in the least disconcerted by his mistake, the driver nodded and started his car. He turned to the east; they passed a few houses on a short street, then abruptly Massanutten Mountain rose before them,

like a green wall. A soft bluish haze was turning it to a gray wall.

"Guess he's right about the rain," said the driver above the noise of his car. "You'll have a sort of dull time to start in the mountain."

"I expect to be busy," answered Nellie Edna. "I won't mind the weather."

The car began to climb a steep grade; in a few minutes the driver had changed gears. The woods enveloped them, but as they climbed higher and began to go round curves, there opened a vast prospect. The driver reached out a pointing finger. "There's the Valley, Sister. When you git to the top, you kin see it all."

"Can we see all the places where there were battles?"

"I guess you kin, pervided you know where they are."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Oh, no, Sister!"

"Was your father in the war?"

"I don't believe he was."

"Or your grandfather?"

"'Deed I don't know. I couldn't tell you."

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Nellie Edna. "I suppose we couldn't stop a minute."

"Don't believe we could. You see, it's gittin' late, an' I got far to go, an' you got far to go. You got a fierce ride yit. Lightfoot'll be waitin' for you down here somewhere. I don't remember the exact spot, but he'll make himself seen."

The car began to descend toward a deep valley. Here was only the prospect of another mountain whose side was even more gray.

"Takes less time to go down than up," remarked the driver. "You kin look for Lightfoot now round one of these curves."

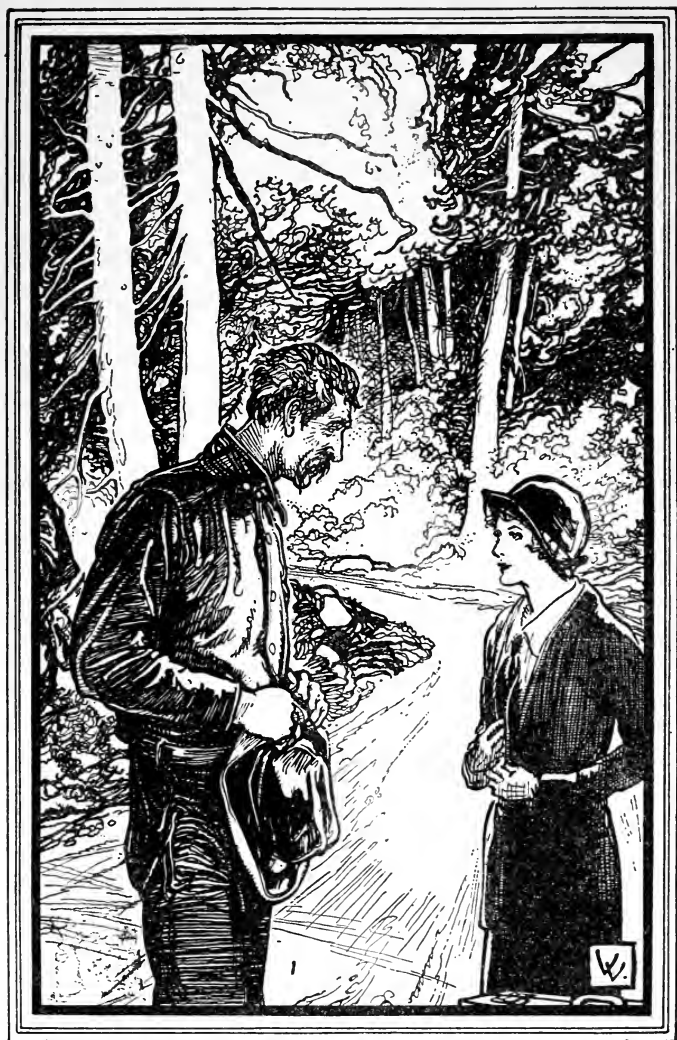
Nellie Edna strained her eyes. The mist was settling thickly in the valley.

"Goin' to have darkness early," prophesied the driver. He began to blow his horn. "Givin' Lightfoot warnin'," he explained. "He'll be along here somewhere."

With sliding of brakes the car came to a stop.

"Here he is!" called the driver. "I got her!" he shouted out the window. "You kin take her baggage from the roof."

From the other side of the road appeared a man. He was tall, much taller than Cousin Dora, and he walked with a more pronounced lope. Nellie Edna looked no higher than his chin; she recognized with an hysterical choke in her throat the accuracy of Aunt Myra's ill-natured description. His clothes



I'm Yo' Cousin, Lightfoot Briscoe



were old and they hung upon him ungracefully, his tawny mustache did suggest undeniably the tusks of a walrus. A gentler judge than Aunt Myra might have likened his gaunt frame and his tanned skin to those of General Harrod. Like General Harrod he had been a warrior, but his enemies had been of a different sort and he had not been victorious.

"Is this Miss Nellie Edna Strickhousah?" Like Cousin Dora, Lightfoot spoke consistently; no *r* or *g* which could possibly be elided, remained.

"It is."

"Come to teach the Stony Man School?" He spoke louder than was necessary, as though he wished the driver to be in no doubt about the nature of this strange rendezvous.

"I'm that person."

"Well, I'm yo' cousin, Lightfoot Briscoe. I got my conveyance yondah."

Lifting Nellie Edna's satchels, he crossed the road. In one prophecy Aunt Myra was wrong—to the buggy which Lightfoot approached was attached not a horse but a mule. In still another matter Aunt Myra was wrong—there were foreign odors about Lightfoot, but they were the odors of smoke from a wood fire, of woods earth, of tobacco, and not of liquor.

"Kindly mount," invited Lightfoot.

Nellie Edna stood looking at the buggy while Lightfoot went to the rear and stowed away her luggage. Powerless to move, she made for the moment no effort to respond to his invitation. The light had grown duller, the rain clouds were settling down. She turned her head and looked back toward the south and there in spite of intervening walls of mountain she saw a white house, and a stout pink-clad lady rocking on a front porch. She saw a sign "Tourists' Lodging," a smooth lawn, a small room. She heard a voice singing loudly:

*Oh, come all you young people,
And listen while I tell
The fate of Elmer Moxley,
A lad we all know well.*

"Is this me!" she said to herself with a shudder. She saw an untidy cabin, a battalion not of brave young heroes, but of rough, brutal, abominable boys bent upon her ruin. She seemed to hear the voice of Aunt Myra bidding her return. "It isn't too late," Aunt Myra would say. "Don't be an idiot! Come back!"

Lightfoot appeared at the side of the buggy.

"All ready? I hope to git well on the way befo' the rain ketches us."

Nellie Edna looked up—his tall person blocked

the way to the south and home; she stepped into the buggy and sat down upon the hard seat, and he stepped in beside her.

"Isn't the mule tied?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" answered Lightfoot with a smile. "He loves to stand. His ha'd time comes when he has to move. Name's 'Ol' Slow.'" Lightfoot could express profound amusement without laughter. Nellie Edna smiled involuntarily.

"Giddap!" said Lightfoot.

The mule turned ponderously and Nellie Edna bent her gaze upon the narrow road as though to read her future. A person unacquainted with the art of swimming, compelled to dive from the safe and solid deck of a vessel in mid-ocean, could have been no more alarmed. "Alarm" was a weak word — Nellie Edna was appalled.

"One thing 'bout goin' home, he don't need no urgin', far as 'tis. He does his best goin' home," said Lightfoot.

"Home!" Nellie Edna saw again the white house, the comfortable figure clad in pink, longed to hear again even the song about the poor man in the cave. She repeated to herself the words of Professor Abernethy, she repeated other words, which she said even more often: "My goal," said she, "is self-improvement. And I'm to earn fifty dollars a month."

CHAPTER VI

NELLIE EDNA shifted uneasily on the hard seat of the buggy; Lightfoot sat without moving, as though long experience had accustomed him to the solidity of excelsior compressed by several generations of use. He moved only his jaws; Aunt Myra was right when she declared that he chewed tobacco. He uttered an occasional "giddap!" and once he turned and looked shyly at his companion. Nellie Edna was not the only frightened occupant of the buggy.

It was not, however, by Lightfoot that Nellie Edna was frightened, and after a long time she turned to address him. She spoke politely but with condescension — it is possible to suffer from an inferiority complex in some relations of life and a superiority complex in others.

"I suppose you've heard of the Battle of Newmarket," said she.

At this, Lightfoot turned squarely round and regarded her solemnly. For a moment he said nothing;

he seemed to have set himself a certain number of mastications before he should speak.

"Missy," said he at last, with a sort of yearning in his voice. "What do you know about them days?"

Nellie Edna came, as John Niblett would have said, "down from her perch."

"Not much," she answered with a laugh and a blush. She looked for the first time directly at Light-foot; his eyes were brown and appealing, with a sort of hunger for friendliness like a dog's. She was touched, and a little ashamed of herself. "This summer a party of sightseers came to our house," she explained. "Among them were the Professor of History at the University of Virginia, and an English General. They talked about matters I knew nothing of, and since then I've tried to learn."

"You mean you talked with great folks like that?"

"Yes, I talked to them and got them their lunch."

"Would you tell me their names agin?"

Nellie Edna enlarged upon her story.

"An' you mean you been tryin' to learn 'bout the Great Wah?"

"The Civil War."

"That was the Great Wah! Nevah been no wah like that, nevah will be. An' Ol' Jack?"

"You mean Stonewall Jackson?"

"I mean him. The othah folks calls him Stonewall,

we folks calls him Ol' Jack. Did they talk 'bout him?"

"They did, they said a great deal."

"I wish I'd heard 'em, that I do!" said Lightfoot.

The mist thickened, tiny drops of rain began to sprinkle the back of Old Slow. They were still traveling on level ground, but trees pressed close on either hand.

"I could 'a' told 'em news, Missy! Why, Missy, my daddy fought with Ol' Jack, and was wounded and come home and died in mid-life because of his wound, and my gran'daddy, he was a casualty, he nevah come home at all, an' old Cahtah Wythe, he nevah come home, and Wythe Woodfill, he nevah come home, an' Fogelsang, he disappeared. They's a chaptah in the 'Pocryphal,"—the word had a vague association for Nellie Edna; she put it into the corner of her mind with other strange words to be looked up—"a chaptah which has this beginnin' 'Let us now praise famous men.' That's what I could 'a' done, Missy! I could 'a' told 'em! From this mountain nobody come back alive an' whole."

"We're in the thick woods now, aren't we?" said Nellie Edna.

"We suah are!" answered Lightfoot. "Soon we leave this road an' turn upwahd." Lightfoot leaned

back, the lines dangling from his hands. "Got to hold on to him case an automobile comes suddenly. By 'n' by I kin let him take his own cou'se. You smell the woods, Missy?"

Nellie Edna sniffed the air. "I do."

"Smells good, don't it?"

Nellie Edna looked about. Close to the road on each side were rocks; where they were not covered with green moss or lichens, they had a lavender color. Where the mist was thin she could see a considerable distance under the trees.

"He was a teacher," said Nellie Edna. "He thought —"

Lightfoot shook his head, then he took from his pocket a plug of tobacco and cut off a small corner, small because he proposed for himself another occupation besides chewing.

"Oh, Missy!" said he in a reproving, yet encouraging tone. "You staht you' story in the middle of the book. You don't staht in Genesis with 'In the beginnin' God created.' You staht way on in the 'Pocryphal. Ol' Jack —"

Old Slow, as though he were spoken to, stopped short; then, undirected, made an abrupt turn to the right. After a moment of amazement, Nellie Edna observed that he had not wandered at random between the trees but had selected an open space in

which there was a road. She realized also that the surface was deeply rutted.

"We have 'bout six mile to go on this upwahd-climbin' track," explained Lightfoot, his tone implying that six miles were all too short for his purposes or his pleasure. "We live six mile from nowhar, we do."

The road was steep; Nellie Edna felt herself sliding into a recumbent position.

"The rain's getting heavier," she said with a shiver.

As though the gentle patter on a million leaves were beneath his notice, Lightfoot made no answer.

"Ol' Jack" — he interrupted his own speech and clambered out, took a lantern from some storage place to the rear and lighting it, hung it on the dashboard. It projected a gigantic shadow of Old Slow on the wall of darkness and foliage.

"Ol' Slow could find his way, but the Kings, they sometimes comes dashin' 'long in they little ol' cah, an' the law says, 'Have a light.' I always obeys the law when I kin. Ol' Jack was in the first place a po' boy," he continued when he had clambered back. "He cropped the sheep, he fetched the wool to the mill, he fetched it home. He flailed the flax fo' the linen clothes. These things he did when he was no mo' than thi'teen.

"Ol' Jack" — after each recounted virtue, Light-

foot paused — “ Ol’ Jack, he was a honest boy. One time he promised a man to ketch him a fish fo’ fifty cents, an’ when he ketched it, it was a powahful big fish, an’ anothah man offahed a dollah. A dollah was big money to little Ol’ Jack, I tell you that! But he wouldn’t take it, no siree! ‘ No! ’ says he. ‘ No, this fish is promised.’ He always kep’ his wo’d, he did.

“ He was a ha’d-wo’kin’, ’dustrious boy. He once wo’ked his way out the Ohio to the great Mississippi by cuttin’ wood fo’ the rivah steamahs. That’s no easy task, I tell you, Missy!

“ He was a smaht boy. He hollowed himself out a canoe. An’ he could read when young an’ play an’ fiddle. I don’t suppose ” — Lightfoot’s voice took on suddenly the same hungry expression which his eyes had had. “ I don’t suppose you kin play a instrument, Missy? ”

“ No,” said Nellie Edna. “ I’m sorry, but I can’t.”

Lightfoot returned to his story. “ When he was seventeen he become constabiliary.” The road grew still steeper, the air darker, the patter of the rain heavier. The shadow of Old Slow took varying shapes; as he and the lantern and the wagon tilted, he was now a monstrous bird, now a giraffe. Lightfoot related incident after incident, but he did not advance beyond the youth of Stonewall. His stories were interesting and there was about them a sort of

narrative perfection, as of stories passed from mouth to mouth and told a thousand times. When he had entered Jackson at West Point, he stopped short. Old Slow stopped also.

"Are we there?" asked Nellie Edna.

"He's breathin' fo' the las' sho't mile," explained Lightfoot. "I suppose you kin sing, Missy?"

"A little."

"I don't suppose you kin take the low paht."

"That's the part I take."

"Then we kin have singin'!" cried Lightfoot joyfully. "Ma, she kin take the high paht, and Dobie, he kin take the tenah. If you kin take the second female's paht, then I kin take the bass. I guess you don' know many of ou' songs?"

"What are they?"

Lightfoot gave a list. "'Ol' Adam' — I guess you don't know that? Or 'Sourwood Mountain'?"

"No," said Nellie Edna.

"Or 'Careless Love' — that's a plaintive tune? Or 'The Frozen Girl'?"

"No," said Nellie Edna.

"An' religious pieces? 'Whar is mah wanderin' boy to-night?' an' 'They was ninety an' nine that safely lay'?"

"I know those."

"I guess you don' feel like singin' now."

"No," said Nellie Edna, politely.

Old Slow took up his weary way.

"If you don't mind, I'll sing," offered Lightfoot.

"He pulls bettah to singin'."

Lightfoot began a song about Stonewall Jackson. He might be able to sing bass in an emergency but his voice was naturally a clear and beautiful tenor.

Come, stack arms, men, pile on the rails;

Stir up the camp fire bright;

No matter if the canteen fails

We'll make a roarin' night.

Here Shenandoah brawls along,

There lofty Blue Ridge echoes strong,

To swell the Brigade's roarin' song

Of Stonewall Jackson's way.

The song had many stanzas, he sang them all.

"I guess you nevah heard that song?"

"No," said Nellie Edna. "I never did. But it's a very nice song."

"I guess those great folk didn't say if he'd lived, everything might have been different?"

"They said practically that. They said he was a great military genius."

"He was fo' suah!" Lightfoot repeated one of the long stanzas. As he concluded, a light other than

that from the lantern shone upon him. Old Slow leaped, lifting up his voice in a bray which shook the world and brought a shriek from Nellie Edna.

"Scahed you, did he!" Lightfoot was divided between concern and amusement. "He sees his home!"

There was not only a light, there was the sound of excited voices, the barking of excited dogs. There was also the heartening odor of frying ham.

"We live, so to speak, on a platfo'm, a platfo'm on a great height. When the leaves is off, I kin show you the world, Missy. Indeed, I kin show it to you befo' the leaves is off. I kin show you all the battlin' places in the Valley — Newma'ket an' Fishah's Hill an' Cedah Creek, an' the passes where he went back an' fo'th confusin' 'em; an' I kin show you the direction of the places what can't be seen — Bull Run, whar he got his name 'Stonewall,' an' Chancellorsville, whar he got his death-shot from his own men by accident. I kin show you the smoke at the cave'ns, an' the smoke at King's an' the smoke at Cahtah Wythe Woodfill's."

Lightfoot concluded with a loud "Ma! Ma!" He was not imitating a lamb bleating for its mother, though Aunt Myra would doubtless have described his call in this way; he was merely summoning Cousin Dora who stood already in the doorway, with smaller vague forms on each side and behind her.

Halting under Lightfoot's skillful manœuvering, Old Slow stopped so that Nellie Edna needed to take only a single step into the arms of Cousin Dora. Cousin Dora received her literally into her arms. She did not wear the grotesque costume in which she went visiting, but a more becoming dress of dark blue made by herself. A great pompadour no longer overhung her face; her hair was parted above a truly noble brow. Under her chin was a large and stiff tie of white muslin.

"Welcome!" said she solemnly. "Welcome!"

Holding Nellie Edna's hand she led her into a room which was larger than any room in the house of Aunt Myra. It had plastered, whitewashed walls, a ceiling of heavy beams on which the marks of the axe were plain, a fireplace and also a stove, and a table covered with a bright red cloth and set with dishes. Suspended above the table was a lamp and round about stood chairs of hickory and splint. Hanging from the shelf above the fireplace was an almanac; on one wall hung two guns, on another a fiddle; on a window-sill lay a large book. In the most distant corner of the room stood three boys and two dogs. Behind them a rough stairway led upward, and all had the air of being about to ascend.

With a queenly gesture, Cousin Dora presented

her offspring. To each she gave a separate introduction.

"Son Dobie, age' twelve. Bow, Dobie."

Grinning, Dobie made an awkward bow. He was dressed as Old Jack himself might have been in shirt and trousers and galluses, though the materials were machine-made and not homespun. He had bright inquiring eyes and a pleasant face. Like the stork he seemed to need but one foot to stand on.

"Named fo' impo'tant kin of Lightfoot's," went on Cousin Dora. "Son Stonewall, named fo' you know who, if you been travelin' with his pappy." Cousin Dora was pleased with her joke. "Bow, Stonewall."

Stonewall bowed; he was a younger replica of Dobie.

"Son Woodfill, named fo' othah impo'tant kin. Bow, Woodfill."

Woodfill bowed and smiled. Being younger and less self-conscious than his brothers, he bowed more deeply and as though he took pleasure in the salutation. Having fixed his brown eyes on Nellie Edna, he seemed unable to take them away.

"Dobie!" said Cousin Dora sharply. "Stan' on you' both feet!"

Dobie assumed the natural position of mankind,

but he stood as if paralyzed. Meeting Nellie Edna's eye, he trembled, then recovered himself.

"Quiet, houn's!" said he.

The two hounds had made no noise. Now they thumped their tails and whimpered.

"While Lightfoot puts the cah in the garage," — thus Cousin Dora's ready wit — "you come to yo' room an' take off yo' hat and make yo' preparation fo' the evenin' meal. Po'tahs!"

Dobie sprang to lift the heavy satchel, Stonewall seized the lighter bag.

Nellie Edna took off her hat and looked about. The walls of her room smelled of whitewash, the ceiling was beamed like that of the outer room. There was a spool bed, a splint chair, a shelf, and a small table on which stood a basin. Poverty looked from everything, but pride and love spoke from everything. The door into the outer room was closed, but sounds and voices came through, first the footsteps of Lightfoot.

"She's an engagin' young lady," said he. "But like the folks in the Valley, she ain't got much info'mation. I'm goin' to learn her 'bout Ol' Jack from staht to finish. I'm goin' to learn her the whole history of the Wah."

"I could learn her to shoot squirrels," said Dobie.

"She'll learn you!" admonished Cousin Dora.

"It's not your business to learn her. Look out she doesn't learn you with a stick! You couldn't see it undah that little bonnet, but her topknot's like flame."

"Undastand, she's all right so long you's all right," said Lightfoot. "An' she can sing second."

"Ain't her speech grand?" said Cousin Dora. "Quick, like a trap?"

"I ain't heard her say nothin'," said Stonewall.

"She don't talk much," said Lightfoot. "She's none of these blathaskites. But what she says has p'int."

"You'll hear her, Stony!" warned Cousin Dora. "I'm thankful fo' her springy speech an' her flamy hair; she'll tame all young wildcats."

"She looks —" Little Woodfill still had his eyes on the door behind which Nellie had vanished. The door opened, but he could not check his speech. "She looks like a blame little wed squiwwel," said he. "That's what she looks like."

Cousin Dora did not reprove her youngest; she looked sternly, however, at the other men of her family who clapped their hands to their mouths.

"Walk up and set," said she to Nellie Edna. Her necktie was a little awry, in her right hand was a large frying pan, and in her left a long fork; she held

them like the scepter of a queen or the mace of a bishop.

A thumping sound issued from near the stove.

"Name of the houn's is Jim an' Lucy," volunteered Stonewall. "An' we got two ol' pigs, Tom an' Jennie, an' young ones what ain't named, an' four roosters an' a sight o' hens."

"Good fo' Stony!" cried his mother. "If they's anything I want my sons to have, it's free mannahs. Now each is introduced to all, an' you kin come an' set up. Miss Nellie Edna — that's what these pupils is to call you if they is cousins though removed — this is yo' chaiah."

The Briscoe family waited until their guest had taken her place, then they too sat down.

"Dobie!" said Lightfoot.

Dobie pronounced a solemn grace.

"Amen," said Lightfoot.

"Miss Nellie Edna's to help herself first," said Cousin Dora. "That's undastood from now on."

The ham and potatoes had a savory smell; against the background of cheerful voices the rain ceased to have a lonely sound. Nellie Edna forgot the white house, she forgot the pink-clad figure, she forgot the appalling menace of the morrow, she forgot even the prospect of earning fifty dollars a month. She observed for the first time a glass set in the middle of the

table and filled with bright flowers. They were not common zinnias such as she placed daily on Aunt Myra's table, and there were strange blue flowers as well as red and yellow.

"I don't know the name of any of those flowers," said she.

"Is that so!" Cousin Dora was amazed. "Well, I kin tell you the common names, if no mo'. That's a little bit of Joe Pye, that's the rose colo'; and that's butterfly weed, that's the bright orange; and that's a lovely wood-lily; and the yellow is foxglove; and that blue's gentian — that you know, I'm suah, Miss Nellie Edna! They have learned names besides, foreign names; I wish I knowed them, I do!"

Nellie Edna flushed red. "I know the botanical name of one plant."

"Kin you say it?" asked Cousin Dora. "Now listen, boys an' all."

Nellie Edna repeated the Latin name of the smoke-tree.

"Ain't that music!" cried Cousin Dora. "I ask you all, ain't that music? I wish you knew some mo'!"

"I wish I did," said Nellie Edna.

"Speakin' of music" — Lightfoot laid down his knife and fork as though food were of no importance — "speakin' of music —"

"Let us first speak of eatin'," interrupted Cousin Dora. "But let us not" — Cousin Dora gave Dobie a sharp glance — "but let us not speak while eatin'. All time's befo' us, Satadays an' Sundays an' the long evenin's of wintah. The time fo' speakin' has no boun's from now till spring sets in. You nevah been in the woods in wintah, Miss Nellie Edna?"

"No," said Nellie Edna with a sinking heart. "I never have."

CHAPTER VII

WAKING in her bed, Nellie Edna lay blinking and trying to identify her surroundings. She was tired and sore; the ruts and bumps of the mountain road seemed to have left corresponding ridges and depressions on her body. The sounds which she remembered to have heard before she slept were different from those which she had heard all her life. No loud record told of Elmer Moxley in the cave, or of the wreck of the *Shenandoah*, or sang the praises of Valencia. The echo in her mind was that of "Old Adam" and "The Frozen Girl" and "Sourwood Mountain." Already she knew the tunes, and the many stanzas of "One Morning in May" were in her mind to stay forever. A stanza hummed itself before she was awake — no, it was Dobie singing.

*Pretty lady, pretty lady, it's time to give o'er.
O no, pretty soldier, please play one tune more,
I'd rather hear your fiddle or the touch of one string
Than see waters gliding, hear the nightingale sing.*

The voices of the children were clear and true, their youthful treble had formed a melodious contrast with the richer tones of their parents.

The remembered speech was strange; Nellie Edna recalled not the voice of Aunt Myra discussing the ingratitude or impertinence of tourists, or planning for the next day's labors, but the voice of Lightfoot. Lightfoot had the last thing before she slept introduced her to what he called the "'Pocryphal," which proved to be, as she vaguely remembered, a section sometimes printed in old Bibles.

"*Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us,*" read Lightfoot.

Lightfoot praised them all, Enoch and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Solomon and David, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He read slowly, with few errors. Several times he lifted his eyes from the page and continued from memory. "*And there rose also Elijah the prophet of fire, and his word burneth like a torch. . . How,*" he cried, "*shall we magnify Zerubbabel?*" and finally, "*May he grant us joyfulness of heart . . . and let him deliver us in his time.*" There were passages which he read twice, though all his hearers nodded and Woodfill slept in his mother's arms.

The sights, when Nellie Edna finally opened her eyes, were strange. She was accustomed to see first

of all the shape of the window at the foot of her bed, then the pattern of the wall paper, bunches of roses tied with blue ribbon bows. Here she saw the window in a strange place at the side of the bed, and round it a plain white wall. The wall was not really white, but gray, and the window opened upon a grayish surface.

At home, waking in the morning, she smelled no odors — here there were many. Heaviest was that of wood smoke, most oppressive was that of frying bacon. More faintly came the smell of decaying leaves and earth, and most faintly of all that of pine.

Outside her door there was whispering.

"I'm scahed!" This she guessed to be the voice of Dobie.

"'Scahed!'" mocked Cousin Dora in a louder tone. "You hurry, or I'll wake her. 'Tain't time to be scahed yit! Wait till she takes down the switch."

A hand touched the door gently.

"Yes?" said Nellie Edna.

Without there was a giggle. "Time to git up!" said the same voice.

Nellie Edna rose. "I'm up!" said she. There were other sounds; she could hear the sizzling of bacon, the drip of water from the roof into a barrel, and the murmur and bubble of a stream. She glanced out the window; not far away rose a gray-green wall,

almost as solid as though it were built of stone. She made her toilet quickly and stepped out into the kitchen. Low in the deep level to which her heart had sunk she compelled herself to repeat a consoling sentence, "I'm earning fifty dollars a month!" She set her teeth, but a slight quiver of her lips she could not control.

Cousin Dora did not wear her new blue cotton wrapper, but a worn wrapper of unbecoming gray. It was very old; patches covered the elbows, and the pattern had long since disappeared. In the pale and dismal light the kitchen and the human beings had a different aspect from that of the evening before. The walls no longer looked freshly whitewashed, the faces of the children were not bright; even the red tablecloth and the flowers had lost their brilliant hues.

Again Cousin Dora held a frying pan in her hand. She was clearly making an effort to rouse the good spirits of her family which had sunk as though they too were saturated with moisture.

"The Good Book says" — Cousin Dora was not as thorough a Bible scholar as her husband, neither was she a literalist in interpretation — "the Good Book says 'the bettah the day, the bettah the deed.' I say different, I say, 'the wo'se the day, the bettah the deed.' It's easy to behave an' be smaht on a fine day;

it's not so easy on a mean day. Isn't that so, Miss Nellie Edna? "

"It is," said Nellie Edna, unconsciously straightening her shoulders.

"Set up to the table," invited Cousin Dora. "You've got just time enough to eat comfo'table. Lightfoot, he's goin' along to the schoolhouse. Did he show you the schoolhouse yestaday? "

"No, Cousin Dora."

"I'll bet he didn't!" laughed Cousin Dora. "He was talkin' 'bout Ol' Jack, or he was singin' a tune, that's what he was doin'. Come on in, Lightfoot."

Lightfoot entered at the door. Rain sparkled on his mustache, a drop tipped each long end. It was easy to see that he was depressed. Behind him came Stonewall, also walking with a long lope, his shoulders low.

"I thought the weathah would suah be fine for the fi'st day!" sighed Lightfoot.

From the dimmest corner of the room, that near Nellie Edna's door, came a whimper; whether it was uttered by little Woodfill or one of the hounds was hard to tell. Lifting the pan from the fire as though it were a weapon, Cousin Dora seemed to brandish it in air.

"I'm 'shamed!" said she. "I suah am! The offsprings of fightahs like yo' gran'pappy an' yo' great

gran'pappy, sighin' ovah a few drops of rain! They wasn't afraid of rains of bullets, they wasn't! "

Lightfoot took his seat at the table. "That's a true wo'd," said he, still in a tone of gloom.

Nellie Edna was suddenly compelled to make a choice — either she must speak, or she must burst into tears. The hideous prophecies of Aunt Myra recurred, filling her with alarm. "How many scholars will I have? "

"'Bout ten or twelve," answered Lightfoot. "Three from this house. The houses ain't very thick on this high platfo'm."

"I suppose the books are all ready? " Nellie Edna's voice was more cheerful. The bacon and bread were good; the coffee could not by any stretch of politeness be called good, but it was strong and strengthening.

"The books is thar, an' the slates," answered Lightfoot. "Ma, she went down an' took the mould off."

"It's fo' you to git the mould off the brains," said Cousin Dora. "Of the two I had the easy job. Eat, Baby! " — this to Woodfill. "Don't eat so fast! " — this to Dobie. "Elbows off the table! " — this to Stonewall.

Having finished breakfast, Nellie Edna went to her room to prepare for her walk. She had overshoes and a green rubber raincoat with hat to match, a present from Aunt Myra, who was generous to her

niece, though opposed to generosity to the world at large. Though there was no large glass in which to see her entire self the stylish costume had a cheering effect upon Nellie Edna's spirits. Returning to the kitchen, she faced a group also rubber-clad. The four male Briscoes stood in a row, brown Jim and white-and-brown Lucy extending the line. Somewhere and somehow the Briscoes had acquired an old rubber blanket; this had been divided into squares of appropriate size and in the center of each a slit had been cut. From four slits projected four tousled heads, four pairs of astonished eyes. Nearby stood Cousin Dora who at sight of Nellie Edna spread out her arms in amazement.

"What does she look like now, li'l Woodfill?" she asked in delight.

"She looks like —"

"A katy-did," suggested Stonewall.

"She looks like a Jack-in-the-pulpit." Little Woodfill crossed the room and put his hand in Nellie Edna's. "I'm the one to lead you down."

His hand in hers, Nellie Edna stepped out the door into the rain. Her heart seemed to float upward, and by some magic mechanism to raise her head.

"There will be many bright days," said she.

"Ain't that the truth!" Cousin Dora spoke ecstatically. One did not need to live near a gas-

station to learn modern speech. "Come back, houn's! Now listen to Tom an' Jennie, you got 'em goin' with your yelpin'!" Cousin Dora dragged the unwilling hounds within doors; Tom and Jennie kept up a hopeful squealing.

Little Woodfill led the way across the clearing which contained a garden, a corn-patch, and other divisions where there had been wheat and rye. He stepped between two tall oak trees—here was a path which evidently had been recently reopened,—branches were cut, tall weeds had been pulled up and lay dead at the side. The rain grew heavier; water dripped from the leaves, ran in streams down the boles of the trees and lay in pools on the ground. One could see only a few feet into the woods, so thick was the haze. The woods possessed mystery, but to Nellie Edna it was a repellent mystery. Unseen, protected from her view by the gray wall and the thick undergrowth, her enemies and persecutors might be at this moment inspecting her with defiant amusement.

"It suah does rain!" sighed Lightfoot from the rear. Still farther in the rear walked Dobie and Stonewall. They giggled continually; now and then, pushing each other into the bushes, they brought down a shower of drops. Lightfoot did not look round, he said only "Whoa, thah!"

"This is a sho't cut," he explained. "It's a mile round by the road, but a half-mile this way. In wintah when the snow's deep, you'll have to go by the road."

"Then we'll tote lunch," said little Woodfill.

"Then you'll stay home," corrected Stonewall.

"No, I won't," declared Woodfill undisturbed.

The schoolhouse came into view and Nellie Edna's heart took another slide downward. The small building, which was made of logs, stood at the edge of a thicket; against the wall was a high pile of cut wood.

"I an' the othah directo's we cut that wood ready," explained Lightfoot. "On a col' wintah mo'nin' you won't have to go fo' wood. Dobie 'n' Stonewall's to come eahly and make the fiah."

A shiver passed up and down the spine of Nellie Edna. As if it communicated itself to Woodfill, he tightened his grasp on her hand.

"Suah do like to go to school to Jack-in-the-pulpit!" said he.

With Woodfill's hand still in hers, Nellie Edna stepped inside the door. There was a small black-board, a good-sized stove, and desks for twenty children. In the corner stood a pail and a dipper, on a shelf was a pile of books and slates; there was nothing to make the room bright or interesting. Dobie and

Stonewall rushed for rear seats, Lightfoot took the huge bell from the shelf and walked to the door. From there he sent its loud peal booming into the woods. Echo brought it back, the world was filled with confused sound.

"It says, 'Come to school! Come to school!'" cried little Woodfill delighted. "Come to school! Come to school!"

As though they were animals lurking in the shadows, a dozen children came forward, accompanied by a few men and women. The men resembled Lightfoot, with some variation of shaving or costume; the women looked like Cousin Dora except that their clothing was even older and more worn than hers. Nellie Edna regarded them in dumb surprise, they stared back, some with alarm, some, it seemed to her, with defiance.

"This is the teachah," announced Lightfoot, proudly. "She's kin to the Briscoes, she's distant kin, it may be, to some of you heah."

Nellie Edna looked into the faces of the pupils and their parents. Lightfoot's misstatement of fact did not seem worth denying. Into her paralyzed mind came a new idea — their expressions were not those of defiance but of awe, even of fright. She remembered with amusement her alarm and excitement when young Mr. Beekman came in the walk to ne-

gotiate for lunch — these people looked as she had felt. Her pale cheeks flushed and she smiled, and when Nellie Edna smiled, light dawned on a grave landscape.

“I’m glad to see you all here,” said she. “Perhaps the parents would like to sit down while we have the opening exercises.”

The children entered first, looking back over their shoulders, and all the parents followed except one man who stood in the doorway as though he must be prepared to dash away.

“Mr. Briscoe,” said Nellie Edna. “You know what songs your neighbors sing — will you please lead us?”

Lightfoot was complimented. “It should be a religious song,” said he. “I propose ‘Whar is my wanderin’ boy to-night?’”

The little shiver again trembled along Nellie Edna’s spine. The air grew heavier, the clothes of all before her looked gray, their faces were gray. Many of the voices were clear and true, and all the singers entered heartily — too heartily, into the spirit of the song:

*Where is my wandering boy to-night —
The boy of my tenderest care,
The boy that was once my joy and light,
The child of my love and prayer?*

The gloom had a contradictory effect upon Nellie Edna; as too deep mourning becomes ludicrous, so the prevalent emotions became absurd.

"Now, Mr. Briscoe, let us sing a patriotic song."

Lightfoot's idea of a patriotic song was one which glorified the prowess of General Jackson. He led off with gusto and all the company followed:

*Come, stack arms, men, pile on the rails:
Stir up the camp fire bright!*

"If any visitor has anything to say, we shall be glad to hear him — or her," announced Nellie Edna. "Then we shall open the school."

Lightfoot rose. "I've just one wo'd to say, Miss Nellie Edna. I see you don't need any directions, bein' so to speak, a bohn teachah. What I have to say is to the children. It is this: Make hay while the sun shines. Wo'k fo' the night is comin'. You may live on Ol' Stony Man Mountain but you have op-po'tunity; now use it. Lee an' Jackson nevah got to be whar they was by idlin'. I have a motto fo' the school, an' I ask Miss Nellie Edna to write it on the boa'd. It is this: 'You may be what you resolve to be.' That was the motto of Ol' Jack, what he wrote in his writin' book, what he kep' all his life befo' his mind's eye."

Nellie Edna wrote the words on the board. They had a familiar sound. "You make your luck!" said Dr. Abernethy.

"That's true," said she. "We'll write it out and keep it at the top of the board."

Lightfoot flushed with pleasure. "Ol' Jack, he had to stick a pine-knot in the fiahplace jamb, that's what he did," said he. "Compahed to him, you suah got it good!"

Lightfoot stepped out the door and the other elders followed. The children, even Dobie and Stonewall, sat motionless, their faces blank. Outside the rain dripped heavily, within there was no sound. Upon the spirit of Nellie Edna fell a paralyzing lethargy; rousing herself with an effort, she began to ask for names. There were two boys whose first name was Briscoe, there was another whose name was Dobie; clearly all were related or connected. All could read except three, one of whom was little Woodfill.

"We shall have three classes." Nellie Edna forced herself to speak briskly. "We can form other classes if some of you advance."

Taking the books from the shelf she found them legible if not attractive. To the directors of the Stony Man School, six miles from nowhere, came no agents with new texts, and these Readers and Arithmetics had been published before Nellie Edna was

born. Her eye measured the stature of the two largest boys—they were but little taller than she, and the dull respect of their expression convinced her of her ability to control them.

Testing the children for what knowledge they possessed, she found that except the Briscoes all were dull and ignorant; there was little chance of turning out Lees or Jacksons. Having no dream of turning out Lees or Jacksons, she was not in the least disappointed. Her only dream seemed certain to be gratified.

"I shan't have any trouble with their behavior," said she to herself. "I shall have plenty of time to study, even in school. I shall send to Teachers' College for a catalogue, and I shall order books. Meanwhile I shall be earning fifty dollars a month. Next year I shall have a better school."

At noon Woodfill slipped his hand into hers, on his face a smile.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked gayly.

"I suah do like school," said he. "What are you thinkin' about?"

Nellie Edna laughed. "You wouldn't be interested!" Her thought was, "A whole half day is gone!"

Her hand still in Woodfill's and closely followed by Dobie and Stonewall, she stepped out into the rain. An alarming idea came into the mind of Dobie.

"It mought rain fo'ty days an' fo'ty nights, as in the days of ol' Noah!" said he.

"It's a good thing we live on this high platfo'm," said Stonewall, declining to be frightened.

Cousin Dora was watching for them; seeing them, she left the doorway and stepped to the stove. Before she served to them the contents of her frying pan, she asked a question.

"Were my children well-behaved?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Nellie Edna heartily.

"A lickin' in school and a double one at home is the perscription if they're not. Ill-behavin' I cannot stand. Wash yo' han's, boys, each an' every!"

"I bin gittin' an education," protested Stonewall. "I ain't been diggin' in the dirt!"

"To the basin," said his mother. "March!"

"An' besides, the rain washed ou' hands as we come along," said Dobie.

"To the basin!" repeated his mother inexorably. "This evenin' we all gathah roun' the lamp an' study till we fall asleep."

Nellie Edna sat down in her place and looked hungrily at the bountiful portion provided by Cousin Dora. Again her spirits took an upward flight.

"I feared only one thing," said she to herself. "And that doesn't exist."

CHAPTER VIII

AT ONE o'clock the woods had already begun to have a twilight look; night which was still far away seemed to be at hand.

"When night comes," said Nellie Edna to herself as she stepped back into the schoolroom, "one day will be over." She remembered a little calendar which she had brought with her. "I'll cross out each day the last thing before I go to bed. I'm earning" — she no longer put the sum into words — it hung before her as though it were printed on the foliage.

The door had been left unlocked and the children were in their places. There was no need to ring the bell, all sat quietly.

"The school will come to order," said Nellie Edna with unnecessary formality. She stood looking at the children and suddenly felt her eyelids drooping. She was accustomed to coffee at noon, and Cousin Dora had provided none.

"I'll be asleep in a minute," said she to herself with amusement. "Children, let us sing something

lively. Does everyone here know 'Sourwood Mountain'?"

The children smiled and little Woodfill laughed gleefully.

"Dobie, you start it."

Dobie delightedly lifted his voice.

*Chickens a-crowin' on Sourwood Mountain,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day;
So many pretty girls I can't count 'em,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day.*

"I know one pretty girl," said little Woodfill.

"Let us sing another stanza," said Nellie Edna, quickly. The children looked as though they had come to life. "Let us clap our hands in time."

*My true love, she's a blue-eyed dandy,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day;
A kiss from her is sweeter than candy,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day.*

The stanza was half finished when Dobie ceased to clap, then Stonewall. Their eyes were fixed upon the window near the front of the room, they quickly transferred their gaze to the window at the rear. Nellie Edna could see only the gray-green wall.

"Come, Dobie! come, Stonewall! 'Ho-dee-ing-

*My true love is a blue-eyed daisy,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day;
If she don't marry me I'll go crazy,
Ho-dee-ing-dong-doodle-allay-day.*

"I know a brown-eyed daisy," said little Woodfill in a loud whisper.

"Silence!" ordered Nellie Edna. "That will do, Dobie." Her bodily stiffness increased, the fears which had been laid rushed upon her. The stranger's purpose was clearly to make her unhappy, to annoy her, perhaps to break up the school. The children looked at him as though he frightened them also; Aunt Myra had said there were boys who tortured small children. In growing panic she saw the school broken up, herself disgraced, her fifty dollars lost and with it all her hopes.

The boy remained standing in the doorway, his cap in his hand. When he smiled, Nellie Edna decided that he was beginning his campaign with mockery and impertinence. Another person might have thought his mien that of an inferior waiting to be addressed; it was in reality that of a courtier before an admired and admirable lady.

"Good afternoon," said Nellie Edna in a curt tone.

"Good afternoon." The boy's voice was low; it had in it some of Professor Abernethy's pleasant in-

flections, but these Nellie Edna was too disturbed to hear. Differently dressed and with his hair trimmed by a professional hand, he might be handsome, but this Nellie Edna was too disturbed to see.

"Have you come to attend school?"

"I have, Miss!"

Nellie Edna's fright heightened once more to panic.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Carter Wythe Woodfill."

"Will you please sit down?"

Large as Carter Wythe Woodfill was, he did not seem disturbed because all the seats at the back of the room were occupied by smaller pupils. He came forward and sat down behind Woodfill. Woodfill smiled fearlessly, but this Nellie Edna did not see. Carter did not see either; he was looking at Nellie Edna, as though to him also she were a Jack-in-the-pulpit, or a katy-did, or some other interesting and beautiful creature.

"What schooling have you had?" asked Nellie Edna, whose face grew each moment more grave.

"None, Miss."

"Do you know?" — Nellie Edna's common sense forsook her — "do you know your alphabet?"

Into the eyes of Carter Wythe Woodfill came a twinkle as though he knew that Nellie Edna was joking. "Yes, Miss!"

Nellie Edna was not joking; along with common sense had fled her sense of humor; she was certain now that the stranger was making fun of her.

"Can you spell words like 'cat' and 'rat'?"

"I can!" Again came the twinkle into the brown eyes.

"Can you" — Nellie Edna took a book from a child in the second row. It declared upon the open page, "The tiger is no friend of man." "Can you read this?"

"I can."

"Can you" — Nellie Edna took a book from the hand of Dobie Briscoe. She opened to a poem. "Can you —"

The young man looked down at the page.

*By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave —*

"Yes, I can read that. Also" — his eyes selected a stanza at random:

*Six white eggs on a bed of hay,
Flecked with purple, a pretty sight!
There as the mother sits all day,
Robert is singing with all his might:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;*

*Nice good wife that never goes out,
Keeping house while I frolic about.
Chee, chee, chee.*

Was there a slightly sarcastic tone in the smooth voice? Woodfill did not find it sarcastic, but purely humorous.

"Spink, spank, spink!" he repeated. "Chee, chee, chee."

Into the face of the stranger came a flush, into his eyes a brighter, harder gleam. He rose and stood very straight and tall, holding his poor cap across his breast.

"I heard from my cousin, Lightfoot Briscoe, of your ability as a teacher. I trusted that if one applied, one could receive instruction in more than the elements. I trusted, I mean, that your curriculum was to include more than the elements. I had hoped to gain some acquaintance with modern science and modern English literature. To give such instruction is manifestly not your purpose."

"It is not!" said Nellie Edna, in answer to this lengthy address.

"Then I am, I might say, *de trop*." The stranger understood the meaning of this French phrase but his pronunciation was poor, his *e* was long like the double *e* in Aunt Myra's record, his concluding sound was that of *p*.

"You are!" Without ever having heard the phrase, Nellie Edna guessed its meaning. She turned her eyes away from the stranger and looked at the back row. "Dobie! Stonewall! James! Rise and come forward!"

Dobie, Stonewall, and James obeyed, but before they could reach the front of the room, the stranger had stepped down the aisle, his stride long, his air lofty. He went out the door and round the corner of the schoolhouse into a woodland path which Nellie Edna had not observed. She turned her head unwillingly and saw him pass the window — there was about his head and shoulders a look of humiliation as of one conquered. There was also a look of cruel hurt, but this Nellie Edna did not see, being occupied with a cruel hurt in her own person. Even her neck was stiff, and her involuntary motion had given it a wrench.

"Open your books at page one!" she commanded.

Presently it was two o'clock, after an interminable time it was three, after an eon it was four. Walking home through the woods, she questioned the children. The stranger had given his name correctly; he was, as he said, Carter Wythe Woodfill.

"He's kin to us," explained Dobie.

"He lives far away," said Stonewall.

"Not so far that you can't walk," added Dobie.

"He lives with Ol' Auntie who fought in the wah," said Little Woodfill.

"'Fought in the wah'!" mocked Dobie. "Wimmin don't fight in no wabs! Her husband fought in the wah. His name was Fogelsong."

"Were you ever at his house?" asked Nellie Edna. Dobie and Stonewall shook their heads.

"I'm goin' sometime," declared Dobie.

"So'm I," said Stonewall.

"So'm I," echoed Woodfill.

"I guess you're goin'!" mocked his brothers.

Nellie Edna stepped slowly over the threshold of the Briscoe house. The recollection of Carter Wythe Woodfill faded away, she remembered only her aching bones.

"Cousin Dora," said she, "I wonder if I might go to bed."

"You're not sick!" cried Cousin Dora in concern.

"No, not in the least. But I'm stiff. I think I must have taken a little cold. I'll be all right in the morning."

"You do just as you like," said Cousin Dora heartily. "This is Libe'ty Hall fo' you. These boys has their lessons assigned, I dare say. It's the heavy air that makes yo' sleepy, an' the highness, not alone the stiffness. Tomorrow we'll have a different day."

Lightfoot sat by the window.

"Ma, she knows," said he. "This is Tuesday — it will be bright by Sataday when we visit the Half-Moon Cave'ns, Miss Nellie Edna an' I."

Nellie Edna had at this moment no interest in caverns; she bade the family good-night and entering her room, undressed and lay down upon her bed. Disappointed exclamations followed her.

"Is she goin' to bed? "

"Why don't she stay with us? "

"I thought I'd learn her a little mo' 'bout Ol' Jack," said Lightfoot.

"She's goin' to rest," explained Cousin Dora. "You'll have plenty of evenin's with her and she with you. Tomorrow is anothah day."

"You always say that!" said Dobie.

"Well, it's a true word."

Having closed her eyes, Nellie Edna opened them again. There was something which she had forgotten; it was not a duty but something pleasant. At last she remembered, and rising sought her little calendar and crossed out September 1.

"One whole day gone," said she and returned to her bed. It was a very hard bed, her bruises were not due entirely to the roughness of the mountain road. But she fell asleep immediately and the mattress set about curing that which it had helped to cause.

In the night she woke from a dream. She saw

General Harrod and Miss Allen and Dr. Abernethy and Mr. Beekman and all looked at her as though they were aggrieved or astonished. Trying to fathom the reason for their displeasure she fell asleep once more. Later in the night she woke again — now a pair of bright eyes seemed to stare at her and she opened her own eyes. The moon was shining and a wind was blowing, creating a great rustling of leaves and a loud sound of dripping water as though from a heavy shower. The eyes continued to stare from the moon itself; they were large and dark and at the same time deep and bright.

"I settled him," said Nellie Edna. "I showed him from the first. He won't come back, I'm sure of that."

In an instant she was again asleep.

CHAPTER IX

A PROCESSION left the house of Briscoe and went south, then east, traveling first on the road which led from the Briscoe house alone, then dropping suddenly downward on a path through otherwise untraveled and thick woods. The fair weather had continued, the sun, which had passed the meridian and was beginning to decline, was unclouded. Heavy rains had preserved the rich foliage of summer, but the discerning eye could tell at a glance that autumn was at hand. The sassafras was turning crimson and gold, the branches of the dogwood and the poison-ivy were reddening, wild artichoke and angelica had ceased to bloom, and here and there asters were lifting their feathery plumes.

Clad in his best suit of corduroy trousers and dark blue shirt with large white china buttons, Lightfoot walked first, with the air of one who makes the path smooth. Another than he might have thought that he could not leave his work; he not only left his work

but quoted a passage which supported him in taking a holiday.

"The 'Pocryphal says, 'Defraud not thyself of a good day.' That means if you don't take good times when they come, you don't git 'em. I kin tell the seasons blindfold," he went on sighing. "They's hencefo'th a sort of listenin' air, as if the things was ha'kenin' fo' the wintry win's."

Behind walked Nellie Edna in her brown dress. Teaching had gone well, the children were obedient, and the school-board, consisting of Lightfoot and two other men, had agreed to provide better books. Not only was a day gone, but four days were gone. Nevertheless, Nellie Edna was not happy. She saw at times a pair of brown eyes atop of a tall figure. It seemed to her that she had seen only Carter Wythe Woodfill's eyes, but other details of himself and his costume had imprinted themselves upon her memory. There had been no opportunity to inquire about him except in the presence of the children who as far as she knew had said nothing at home about his visit.

"I'll ask Lightfoot today," she determined.

Behind her walked Dobie and Stonewall. Like his father each wore a new shirt of dark blue with large white buttons. Over Dobie's arm hung Nellie Edna's coat which Cousin Dora had bade her take with her,

and which she directed Dobie and Stonewall to carry in turn.

"The cave'ns is cool," she explained. "We don't want you gittin' cold." At times Cousin Dora looked at her lodger as one might at a precious and helpless infant; at other times as though she combined the genius of Lee and Jackson to whom Lightfoot so frequently referred.

Dobie carried Nellie Edna's coat in different fashions, now as if it were an infant, now a sack of grain. His daring amused his brother to the point of hysteria.

"The boys is the reah-gua'd," explained Lightfoot. "I'd like to take 'em in the cave'ns, I suah would, but they been in befo' and this is the busy season, an' I can't ask too many favohs." Lightfoot sighed again. "The summah time is almost past. Wintah is suah a long month."

At the point where they left the vaguely marked road Lightfoot stopped. One could not say that he stopped short, he did nothing abruptly.

"Some one comin'," said Dobie, whose ears were quick.

From the direction in which they had been advancing approached two men. One was short, the other tall, but both were heavy, and both walked with a slouching gait.

"Mo'nin', neighbo's," said Lightfoot.



*One of Them Answered Sullenly, the Other Did not
Answer at all*



One of the strangers answered sullenly, the other scowled. The boys looked after them and began to whisper to each other.

"Are they neighbors?" asked Nellie Edna.

"Not close neighbo's, but close enough," explained Lightfoot. "I guess you didn't smell anything as they went by?"

"I smelled liquor."

"Presume you did! They's a bad lot, they is. They give us a bad reco'd in the co'ts, such folks do. They make the moonshine, then they drink what they want and sell the rest, then they shoot each othah up."

"Where do they make the drink?"

"Nobody knows. The officahs raided their house, but they didn't find nothin'."

"What is their name?" Unintentionally and involuntarily Nellie Edna lowered her voice. The trees seemed suddenly very high, and there were uncanny rustlings in their summits. When Dobie shouted, "There's a squirrel, Pappy!" she gave a start.

"Name's King," said Lightfoot. "Noble name fo' such bad people! When the leaves is off the trees I kin show you their smoke risin' beyon' Cahtah Wood-fill's smoke." Lightfoot motioned toward the east. "They live neighbo's to Cahtah."

"Who is Carter?" asked Nellie Edna.

Between the members of the rear-guard rose a loud discussion, drowning out all else.

"The cave'ns is a thousand feet deep."

"They is not! "

"They is! "

"Too much talk," said Lightfoot in mild reproof. "Ol' Jack, he nevah talked much; he acted. We got Ol' Jack to West P'int, Missy; some day we'll take him along anothah spell. Look out, Missy!" Lightfoot held out his hand. "We go down steep now."

"Are the caverns under the mountain? "

"Pahtly. You go inside the mountain, then you go down sha'p."

"Who is Carter? "

Again Nellie Edna was interrupted. "Heah we are! " cried Lightfoot.

The trees stood out as individuals, the undergrowth having been cut away. Scattered about were many tents, farther on were a group of low stone buildings. In sight were several hundred persons and at least fifty automobiles.

"It looks like a picnic," said Nellie Edna.

Walking briskly across the grassy space, his long step lengthening to a stride which required almost a run from his companions, Lightfoot went toward the largest of the stone buildings. Entering the single

room of which it was composed, he spoke to a young woman behind a desk.

"I'm Lightfoot Briscoe, Miss, an' I have a lady with me I'd like to treat."

"Very well, Mr. Briscoe." The young woman held out a ticket. "Tell her to go down with the next party."

Lightfoot proceeded across the grass to a smaller building.

"You put on this coat, Miss Nellie Edna." He took the coat from the arm of Stonewall who was its present custodian and held it out. "Now we'll be waitin' fo' you. Don't be afraid."

In a bare ante-room were gathered twenty-five or thirty persons. On one side was an iron grating, before which waited a tall young man.

"Kindly step back from the door."

The party, which had pressed forward, moved back. The iron grating opened and there issued another party of twenty-five or thirty. With them came a wave of cool air.

"I'm glad I'm out!" cried one.

"I'll say!" echoed another.

"But I'm glad I went in."

"I'll say!"

"Were you afraid?"

"Sometimes I was."

"My, isn't it hot!" The tourists began to shed their coats.

"It seems that we walked ten miles," said a stout lady in an exhausted tone.

"Is it ten miles?" asked a frightened voice from among those about to descend.

"Two miles, taken slowly," corrected the guide. "Not as much walking as a lady would do getting dinner for a hungry family.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen" — he led the way down the steps. "Here are a few steps downward — thirty-eight to be exact." The door closed with a clang, daylight gave place to electric light. "Have no fears. No water will drop from the roof to spoil your new hat, no fat man's misery will make you regret your dinner or embarrass those who do not count calories. There are neither quicksands nor morasses. Unless your heels are too high you will be in no danger of slipping or sliding. No wild beasts will attack you. The dinosaur does not have his home here, the ichthyosaurus has not come hither to die, the giant *gyascutus* has disappeared from the earth."

Nellie Edna laughed and the rest of the party turned a startled gaze upon her. The guide looked at her with a twinkling eye. He led the way from the last step out upon a floor of clay.

"Only once in the many years I have guided here have I encountered a wild beast of any sort."

"What was that?"

"A bat."

"A bat!" A young woman shrieked.

"And he was dead. Let me tell you before we progress farther, that you need at no time have any fear of being enwrapped in Stygian darkness. In the early days when men crept on hands and knees through the unwidened passages of these marvelous caves, there was constant danger that torches might fail, or candles cease to send out longer their feeble gleam. But when the Creator of the World said 'Let there be light,' he had in His infinite mind the caverns as well as the open spaces. Did He not create the unexplained, unexplainable and magic power of electricity which should some day illumine them? Farther on we shall experience, thrilled, but unalarmed and unhurt, the powers of darkness, but not now. Until the abyssmal and invisible depths are exhibited to you, you will have ample illumination. When that time does come, you may hold each other's hand until light again flashes upon you. Or you may hold mine."

There was a responsive and gratifying snicker. The guide stood near Nellie Edna. "A rise at last!" said he in an undertone.

"You are now" — he turned a switch, and the walls and ceiling of a low room were revealed — "in Herta's cave. In such a place as this, still near the surface, a witch might have held audience before going forth to nightly rides on her broomstick. It has all the desirable furnishings for such a tenant. There is a seat for the ancient woman, there is a fireplace where she might prepare her ghastly brew. There is a rough couch upon which she could sleep through the day, after she had abandoned her airplane.

"You feel already" — the guide proceeded through a long passage into a larger room — "you feel already the cooling zephyrs of the Passage of the Winds, before you enter the Forest Cave. Here before you" — a brilliant illumination was cast upon stalactites and stalagmites, like the clay floor in color. "Before you is the first of the great deposits which have made the cave superior to all others in wonder. See the trees rising from the floor! See the others descending to meet them from the roof! It is the reverse of a grove shadowed in a lake. The reflected trees grow apart, root to root. These trees grow toward one another, as though they sought to reach each other and amalgamate into a solid mass."

"How long would that take?" asked a practical voice.

"About a million years. Even then their tips only

would have met. You would find fat men's miseries where there are now spacious passages, but you would still be able to get through."

The guide led them on with increasingly flowery descriptions. He called their attention to a hundred vague resemblances — here was a billiard table, here was a heap of cannon balls, here a bear, here a dog. He made a feeble joke about a mass of rock in which he claimed to see a similarity to a Ford car. He led them past a Giant's Causeway in miniature, he pointed out what he described as Mount Everest. Frequently he mixed geology and philosophy and history in strange confusion.

"You are now a hundred feet under the earth," said he. "But your eye shall carry you far deeper. Approach yonder wall and look over."

Gingerly the tourists stepped toward a low wall. He turned on a light and far beneath appeared a trickling stream.

"The river Lethe," he announced. "Truly he who falls therein will know no more. When you come back another year we shall have steps, then you will be able to descend safely and try a draft of the pure and magic water, and issuing hence be even more young and beautiful than you are already."

"If that is possible," commented an irreverent voice.

He exhibited the greater wonders of the cavern. The stalactites and stalagmites were no longer clay-colored but white, or rosy. In one room the ceiling was an azure blue. He led them at last to a miniature lake of water reflecting fairy-like pendants.

"It's not water, it's glass!" cried a sceptical voice. As if in answer the water rippled.

"A drop of water has fallen!" explained the guide. "A drop falls on the average of one a minute, has been falling on the average of one a minute for a million years. Now I'm going to turn out the lights. Let the timid seize hold of the strong. You may think you know what darkness is — you will learn that you are mistaken." There was a click, the bright light on the lake faded; another, it grew still more dim; still another and all was black.

"Gracious!" said a woman. "You can feel it!"

"See whether you can see your hand before your face."

Nervous laughter answered.

"We shall remain in darkness for a few moments longer while I tell you that here the caverns end. Beyond, the hand of the Creator says 'Stay!' Here begin to rise the eternal walls of the solid mountain. The passage through which we entered is tortuous — a person imprisoned here might easily go round and

round in blackness until he became mad. Shall I turn on the lights? ”

“ Yes,” answered a tremulous voice. “ Instantly.”

The lights flashed on, and as if to bring them gradually back to earth, the guide quoted poetry:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan,
A stately pleasure-dome decree,
Where Alph, the sacred River, ran
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea.*

They came at last to the foot of the long steps. The guide looked in a friendly fashion at Nellie Edna.

“ Which part did you like best? ”

“ The stream far below and the blackness! Did you — you didn’t guide a party through this summer, a party of a lady and three gentlemen, one of them a General from England! ”

“ I did,” answered the young man. “ They were a special party. I had them alone. Do you know them? I got their autographs.”

“ I do know them,” said Nellie Edna, her cheeks aglow.

The guide continued his address as he climbed the steps. “ We hope you’ve enjoyed yourselves and that you’ll come again.” He slid open the iron door.

"Take you down any time free!" he whispered to Nellie Edna.

"Heah she is!" Nellie Edna heard a familiar voice and saw the tall figure of Lightfoot and the shorter figures of Dobie and Stonewall. "Did you have a good time?"

"I did."

The heat of the comfortable September afternoon seemed intolerable, though the sun was nearing the horizon and there was a breeze.

"My, it's hot up here!" said Nellie Edna.

"That's what they all say."

Nellie Edna looked back over her shoulder toward the waiting-room. In a show-case were boxes of candy of various sizes and prices; she had seen them when Lightfoot interviewed the young woman in charge. On the lid of one was a picture of a small boy who might be taken for Woodfill. The price was but fifty cents and Nellie Edna had more than fifty cents in her pocket. But she was not accustomed to making presents; moreover into her mind came Aunt Myra's precept, "Don't give unless you receive in return."

"I did receive in return," she said to herself stubbornly. "The ticket would have been a dollar and fifty cents and I got in for nothing. I'll do it," said she. "No, I won't," said she. At last she ran back.

"I have saved a dollar." She reappeared with the box in her hand. The eyes of the boys grew wide.

"It's for your mother and Woodfill," she explained. "Because they didn't come."

The faces of Dobie and Stonewall looked blank.

"Do you think Ma an' you' li'l brothah won't give you none?" laughed Lightfoot. "We must git 'long home now, da'kness is a-comin'. I'll bet Ma's got a good suppah a-waitin' us."

The boys now formed the advance guard. They asked question after question. What did she think of the lake? Of the deep stream? Of the little old Ford? As they stepped from the woods into the wood-road, a tall figure passed them, carrying a basket. Quickened by a variety of emotions, Nellie Edna's heart gave a jump.

"Hi, Cahtah! Cahtah!" cried Lightfoot, and the figure paused. "All goin' well with you?"

Carter looked astonished at Lightfoot and his company.

"We been in the cave'ns," explained Lightfoot. "This young lady's the teachah. We took her to the cave'ns. Won't you stay stopped a minute?"

"I can't," answered Carter clearly. "Auntie's been alone while I went to the store."

"Come ovah an' visit with us!" Lightfoot had to raise his voice, so far away was Carter.

"Thank you, sir!" he called back.

"Who" — but Nellie Edna needed to ask no questions.

"That's Cahtah Wythe Woodfill," explained Lightfoot. "He lives ovah yondah. He's kin of mine. His great gran'pappy was a famous man heah-about. He had a pa'k, but now it's nothin' but a wildaness. He had springs, but they's sunk in the ground and vanished. He was a casualty, too, like my gran'pappy. He went to the Wah, and he nevah come home. Cahtah had a great-uncle who was a casualty. His name was Fogelsang, he was a strangah in these pahts. He nevah come back. He had books and instruments and they was those that said he did the devil's wo'k. It's a long time ago.

"Mrs. Fogelsang, Cahtah's great gran'pappy's sistah, what was married to Fogelsang, is still livin'. You'll be su'prised to know that. But she is. All the rest is gone of all the generations but her and Cahtah. She held heart an' soul with the South, an' some says Fogelsang held with the No'th, an' had Yankee soldiers about, plottin' some great disastah. Now she's lost her intelligent mind. She does a little wo'k to help po' Cahtah, but most of the time she goes round sayin' the same wo'ds ovah and ovah. This is what she says, 'How long till I die? How long till I die?' She may well ask, she's a old, ancient woman."

Nellie Edna stumbled on the darkening ground. The boys were gone, having run ahead.

"Bet they've gone to tell 'bout the candy!" said Lightfoot. "Young ones is jest like sieves."

"Where do the Woodfills live?"

"Ovah yondah." Lightfoot waved his long arm. "I'll show you they smoke. Sometime I'll take you 'long ovah. It's a wild place. They's old, odd trees and bushes from the old pa'k."

"Was it an amusement park?"

"It was a pa'k at the springs. Folks went to drink the watahs an' to bathe in the watahs fo' health's sake."

"Does this young man live alone with this old woman?"

"All alone," answered Lightfoot. "He looks aftah her, he's a kind boy. He ought to go away, he has a powaful good mind, but he can't go away an' leave her. He could make somethin' teachin' the school if he could leave her."

"Would he be competent to teach the school?" asked Nellie Edna.

"To be suah!" declared Lightfoot. "He's a educated boy, he is. He has books an' books an' books."

"He has!" cried Nellie Edna. "Oh my!"

"Stub you' toe?" inquired Lightfoot kindly. "The lights of home!" he cried without waiting for

an answer. "An'" — he was interrupted by a mighty bray. Nellie Edna had already heard it many times but she should never, she was certain, become accustomed to it. "An' the soun's of home!" cried Lightfoot in glee. "You ce'tainly can't fool Ol' Slow, he knew me a mile away." Lightfoot put the box of candy in Nellie Edna's hand and struck out toward the stable. "If you get home befo' I do," he sang. "Jes' tell 'em I am comin' too.'"

CHAPTER X

C OUSIN DORA stood on the threshold watching for the return of the exploring party. She had put on her dark blue dress — it was made, one saw, of the same substantial and wear-proof material as the upper garments of her husband and sons.

“Welcome!” she called. “Welcome! We will have a happy evenin’ tellin’ of the wondahs of the nethamost.” Her eye was fixed upon the face of Nellie Edna with a rigid fixedness. Informed of the prospective present, she looked with determination away from the hand which carried the candy box.

“Did you have a good time?”

“I did.”

“Did it come up to you’ expectations?”

“Indeed it did! And we brought you a present.”

Nellie Edna presented the box.

“Fo’ me?” said Cousin Dora solemnly.

“For you and Woodfill.”

Woodfill came shyly forward. "Fo' me!" he cried in rapture. Stonewall and Dobie also came forward.

"We will set down." Cousin Dora held the box high above the heads of her offspring. "Like pups, you act! When suppah's ovah and the edge of appetites is et off, then will be time to open the box. Meanwhile you, Dobie an' Stonewall, to the basin."

The lamp burned brightly, the table-cloth had a very cheerful look. In the center was a fresh bouquet of flowers. The young people seated themselves, and Lightfoot, entering from the stable, offered a prayer. Cousin Dora served large portions of fried ham and boiled potatoes. There was an air of excitement about her too keen to be explained even by the festivity of the occasion and the prospective pleasure of a fresh judgment upon the caverns.

"When the dishes is washed an' all is cleaned away, I have a su'prise," she announced.

"Fo' me?" cried Dobie.

"Fo' me?" cried Stonewall.

"I guess it's fo' me," said little Woodfill.

"You got you' su'prise," said Stonewall and Dobie together.

"It's fo' none of you," said Cousin Dora, her eyes upon Nellie Edna.

"Is it someone comin'?" asked Dobie.

"No, it's nobody comin'. Eat, but eat slow, and perhaps you'll find out."

The Briscoes ate, but they did not eat slowly. When the table was cleared and the dishes washed, Cousin Dora fetched from upstairs a small and apparently heavy parcel, a roll of newspapers and a few letters.

"The sto'keepah, he brought this to us," she explained. "It come yestaday already. Woodfill, he was playin' in the woods, so it's a su'prise to him too. The package says 'Miss Nellie Edna Strickhousah, care of Mrs. Lightfoot Briscoe, Stony Man, Virginia.' In the co'nah is a odd name."

Cousin Dora set the parcel upon the table and Nellie Edna read the address. The name in the corner was W. T. Abernethy, Charlottesville, Virginia. Inside the cord which bound the parcel, the store-keeper had placed a letter with the same address. Reading her name, Nellie Edna grew pale.

"Are you su'prised?" asked Cousin Dora.

"I am."

"What do you think is in it?"

"I have no idea."

"It's heavy," said Stonewall weighing the parcel.

"Han's off, son!" commanded Cousin Dora.

"I'll get a knife," offered Dobie.

"A knife!" mocked Stonewall. "That's a good string."

"The newspapah an' the othah lettah is from you' Aunt Myra," said Cousin Dora. "Shall I untie the string while you read the lettahs?"

"If you please."

Nellie Edna opened the envelope postmarked Charlottesville. The letter was short.

Dear Miss Strickhouser:

Yesterday on my way a little distance up the Valley, I learned from your aunt your whereabouts and your plans. I'm glad to hear that you intend to continue your schooling. I have made up a small parcel of books which may help you to do what is most important for our rural teachers—interest the pupils and their parents in their own surroundings. If I can be of any further help, please call upon me.

*With all good wishes, I am,
Very sincerely yours,
William T. Abernethy*

"These are books!" she explained, excitedly. "From one of the gentlemen who stopped at our house. I told you about them. This gentleman is a professor at the University of Virginia."

"Ol' Cahtah Woodfill went to that school!" cried Lightfoot. "An' old Fogelsang, he was a teachah!"

If Cahtah Wythe Woodfill went to school, that's the place he'd go! "

Cousin Dora concluded a painful opening of the package and produced the string unbroken.

"Knots is ha'd when you ain't got good front teeth," said she. "Back, Dobie! Back, Stonewall! It ain't you' su'prise! "

Nellie Edna removed the heavy paper and lifted a little book. "'Wild Flowers East of the Rockies,'" she read. "He means, I suppose, that we shall learn all the flowers."

Cousin Dora pointed to her bouquet. "Do you suppose them flowahs are in that book? "

"I do."

"With the learned names? "

Nellie Edna took a swift glance. "They are."

"Ain't that wonderful, Dobie an' Stonewall? "

Nellie Edna lifted a similar volume; the title read "Land Birds East of the Rockies." She opened it and held it up. "Do you know that bird, boys? "

"That's a blame robin," cried little Woodfill.

"Tut! tut!" reproved Cousin Dora. "Hush now, you Dobie, don't laugh at him! "

"Look here!" cried Nellie Edna. She held a larger book toward Lightfoot.

"I can't read it, Missy," said Lightfoot. "I'm too tremblin'?" "

" 'Life of Stonewall Jackson,' " read Nellie Edna.

" That's suah what it says on the outside," said Dobie.

" Here's a book of poetry," said Nellie Edna.

" I was deplorin' the wintah months," said Lightfoot. " If Missy will read these books, they'll pass only too quick."

" They suah will! " said Cousin Dora.

" You ain't looked at the papahs yit," said Stonewall.

" Or you' auntie's lettah," said Cousin Dora.

" An' we forgot the candy," remarked Woodfill.

" Fo' the lan' sake! " shrieked Cousin Dora.

" Nevah did I think so well of my family that they would fergit candy fer books! "

" When the candy's passed, I will tune up my fiddle," said Lightfoot. " We'll have a taste of 'Turkey in the Straw' an' 'Sourwood Mountain'; then I'll say we read from one of these wo'ks."

In the midst of loud exclamations in praise of the candy, Nellie Edna read Aunt Myra's letter.

Dear Nellie Edna:

How are you getting along up on the hill? I guess you found everything as I said it was. I certainly hope you're not tore up. What do you think, John Niblett was here. I certainly gave him the go-by.

You'd have thought I never knew him. And one of your grand friends was here, more than middle-aged, I'll say. I believe you could easy get a school in the Valley. They say teachers are scarce. I'm looking round. All I've got to say is look out for yourself. If you don't nobody else will, believe me. I'm sending you the newspapers with the funnies, perhaps they'll help to pass a rainy day.

Better tear this up. Write soon, and give my regards to the Briscoes.

Your Aunt Myra

P.S. The tourist season is slackening off. It was good while it lasted.

"I once had peppamints an' I once had chocolates," announced Dobie with his mouth full. "But I nevah had them in one piece."

"I nevah befo' bit into chocolate and found a nut," declared Stonewall.

Little Woodfill came close to Nellie Edna. Taking smaller bites than his brothers, he was able to speak more clearly.

"I ce'tainly am glad we cut up the room," said he.

"What do you mean?" asked Nellie Edna, puzzled.

"You was to say nothin' 'bout that, son!" cried Cousin Dora.

"What does he mean?" asked Nellie Edna again.

"We cut the room off the big room fo' you," explained Stonewall.

"We used to could see out that-a-way," added Dobie.

"We all is glad we done it," said Cousin Dora. "I don't mind the boys tellin' you since they's glad we done it."

Nellie Edna saw a queer balance. On one side was a box of candy which cost fifty cents, on the other was a room, cut out of a living-room which was none too large for the activities of a household. Nellie Edna blushed. Suddenly Lightfoot's fiddle spoke up.

"Come on," he called. "'My gal's a blue-eyed dandy.'"

When Nellie Edna went to bed a bright moon shone through the lacy trees and the sound of Lightfoot's muted fiddle softly filled the air. He had stepped out in the warm night and sat outside the front door tilted back on a chair, and nearby on the step sat Cousin Dora. The boys had long since gone upstairs.

Nellie Edna could not sleep. A procession passed through her mind — human beings, all strangers to her a few weeks ago — Mr. Beekman, Miss Allen, Dr. Abernethy, General Harrod, the Briscoes, the children in school, the guide in the caverns. Sometimes she seemed to be in the caverns, she saw the strange con-

torted figures, the gleaming mirror of the little lake, the rippling water, heard the voice of the guide:

"A drop of water has been falling, one a minute on the average, perhaps for a million years. We don't know definitely, we know nothing definitely. . . You may think you know what darkness is! . . . Beyond here the hand of the Creator says 'Stay!' Here begins the solid mountain. A person imprisoned here might easily go round and round until he became mad."

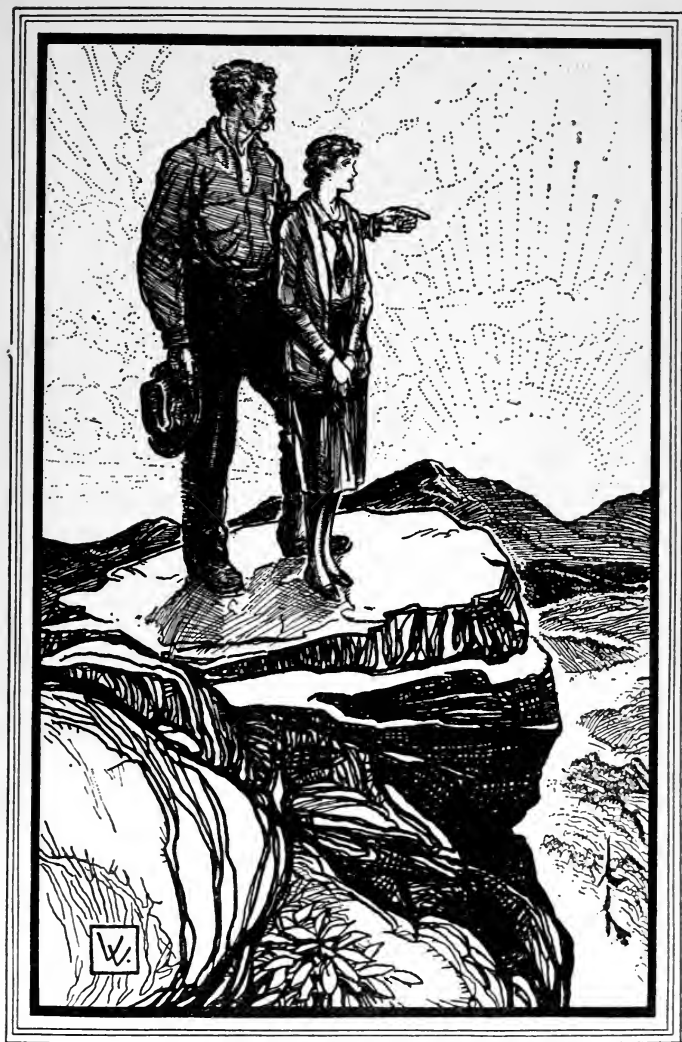
It was not only excitement which kept Nellie Edna awake, it was not only ambition, quickened by Professor Abernethy's letter. In her heart was an ache, persistent, not to be stilled. At the end of the procession she saw a tall figure vanishing into dim and rainy woods, vanishing again, a little bent under the weight of a heavy basket, into woods which were growing black.

"Perhaps I could make peace with him," she thought. "I might persuade him that I was rude because I was frightened."

CHAPTER XI

NELLIE EDNA walked through the woods; behind her or ahead of her or beside her, according to the whim of the moment, walked Dobie and Stonewall. The October air was cool, and to their summer costume of shirt and trousers each had added a sleeveless sweater, worn survivals of the Great War sent to country stores for sale. They were still barefooted, but they could not go much longer unshod. With a laugh Cousin Dora deplored the necessity of buying shoes. "I ask you, what's the use of gittin' good callouses on the soles only to put on shoes over 'em?"

Walks on Saturdays were as regular an exercise as school sessions on other week days. On Sundays Lightfoot conducted religious services, there being no church near at hand. Until today every Saturday had been a good day for Lightfoot, but today the last of the corn from his little patch must be husked. He generously dismissed the boys, remarking that you couldn't keep young colts tethered.



"Thah to the West Is the Whole Valley," Said Lightfoot



According to his promise, he had escorted Nellie Edna to high points and had indicated the interesting localities.

"Thah to the West is the whole Valley," said he. "You know 'bout the Valley campaign, Missy? Up yondah fa' out of sight, the Union Army come down to Hahpah's Ferry. Facin' 'em was Ol' Jack, an' he withdrew, not because he was afraid of 'em, oh, no! He was leadin' of 'em on. Back an' forrard he went, forrard an' back, givin' 'em battles an' skirmishes an' all fo'ms of wah to keep 'em busy. Way up yondah is Winchestah, that was a battle, an' ovah thar is Cedah Creek an' Fishah's Hill an' below is Newm'aket whar them brave little boys fought like tighs. I don't doubt we'll read 'bout these mattahs in you' book, an' when we do, you'll know the places.

"When the Valley campaign was ovah, he swep' into the othah Valley, 'way out of sight 'cause of the mountains. He kep' the Yankees busy, I kin tell you! At first our own folks thought he was nobody, jest nobody. Then they found out different. To the east is Chancello'sville, an' thar he met his end. Ridin' out to negotiate the prospect, Missy, an' shot down by his own men! He lingahed a few days, then says he, 'Let us cross ovah an' rest in the shade of the trees,' he says. That's what he done, he rested in the

shade of the trees fo'evah, an' they had to git on without him as best they could."

"I think you know a great deal about the war," said Nellie Edna.

"Brought up on it."

"The man who drove the bus didn't know anything."

"You can tell that to look at him. I know all 'bout his fam'ly. He's one of these 'come day, go day, God send Sunday' folks. His pappy was an idlah, but his gran'pappy was all right. His gran'pappy was one of those what didn't come home, 'long with my gran'pappy and ol' Woodfill an' ol' Fogelsang. A many good men were lost at that time."

"Was that Carter Wythe Woodfill's grandfather?" asked Nellie Edna, blushing as she spoke. She had not seen Carter Wythe Woodfill, and had had no opportunity to carry out her intention to apologize.

"No'm, that was his great gran'pappy, an' Fogelsang, he was his uncle; that is, his great gran'uncle."

This afternoon Nellie Edna and the boys had no set goal. They wandered along the path toward the caverns, the boys singing, then talking, then singing again. They selected what Lightfoot would have called a plaintive tune. It was a suitable air for the woods, soft and tender as the wind and the sentiments of which it spoke.

*Heah the win' blow, deah,
Heah the win' blow,
Hang your head ovah,
Heah the win' blow.*

*Go, build me a castle
Fo'ty feet high;
So I kin see him,
As he goes by.*

*Roses love sunshine,
Violets love dew,
Angels in heaven
Knows I love you.*

Nellie Edna said little. She had not been studying in school hours, but she had been studying every spare moment out of school and her mind was upon a Latin declension. Dobie and Stonewall ceased to sing and began to argue. They never lacked subjects for conversation, and they were becoming each day more loquacious.

"They got some few gran' words now," said their mother in delight. "'Fore you come, Miss Nellie Edna, they had only common words."

At the present moment they were discussing the fate of Orphan Annie who was still in the hands of the robbers. The foolish drawings had served a

good purpose; tacked up by Nellie Edna in the schoolroom, they had given tongues to silent children.

"I'll bet she nevah gits away from 'em," prophesied Dobie.

"If I was her, I'd" — Stonewall did not complete his brave sentence; walking ahead of Nellie Edna he suddenly dropped back to her side. "Dobie!" said he in a whisper.

"What's the matter?" asked Nellie Edna.

A stranger coming suddenly into view from the thicker woods answered the question by his presence. Nellie Edna recognized him as one of the two sullen men to whom Lightfoot had spoken on the way to the Half-Moon Caverns. He looked at them in surprise and stepped out of the path.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Nellie Edna.

The stranger mumbled an answer and proceeded in the general direction of the caverns.

"That was Lute King," said Dobie, still in a whisper.

"He's a bootleggah," said Stonewall, also in a whisper. "He makes moonshine, an' sells it. They can't find whar he makes it."

Nellie Edna looked back. She could not be certain, but she believed that the stranger stood under a tree still watching them.

"He won't hurt you," she said. "He wouldn't dare. Come along."

"Whar we goin'?" asked Dobie.

"That's the road down to the caverns, isn't it?"

"Yes'm."

"We've been there; let's keep on this road."

"This goes to Cahtah's house."

"Does it?" Nellie Edna continued without changing her direction.

The boys looked at each other; they were clearly pleased and at the same time a little fearful.

"The Springs is all gone."

"Are gone," corrected Nellie Edna.

"Are gone," repeated Stonewall.

"Ol' Auntie's there," said Dobie with a little shiver. "I'm sort of 'fraid of Ol' Auntie."

"What harm could she do you?"

"She might put a spell on us."

"Nonsense!" said Nellie Edna. "Is it far?"

"Not so very," said Dobie.

"'Bout a mile, I guess," said Stonewall.

Nellie Edna stepped into the road which became even narrower, as though fewer persons used it. The wall of green was close-grown; it was not possible for Dobie and Stonewall to make galloping excursions into the woods and return in a few moments. Alder and elderberry, sassafras and dogwood composed a

thicket which appeared impenetrable, and overhead towered oak and pine. The boys walked close to Nellie Edna, one on each side, their course gradually downward.

"We must be on a level with the entrance to the caverns." Nellie Edna grew more inclined to talk as the boys grew more silent. "Is that about two miles away, do you think?"

"Yes'm."

"What's that?" she asked sharply.

The boys stopped short and Stonewall took her hand. She was pointing, not to a wild beast or to a dangerous human being, but to a tree. It seemed to be an evergreen, but its needles were a paler and much brighter green than those of any evergreen with which she was acquainted. "What is that tree?"

"Don't know, Miss Nellie Edna."

"And that?" Nellie Edna pointed to another with enormous leaves and red fruit.

"Don't know, Miss Nellie Edna. I nevah saw such trees. This is Cahtah Wythe Woodfill's great gran'-pappy's pa'k roun' the Springs."

"Listen!" said Nellie Edna sharply.

Stonewall who had let go her hand seized it again and Dobie took hold of her skirt.

"What is it?"

Again that which startled Nellie Edna was only a sound of nature. "Don't you hear that queer sighing?"

"That's in a tree, that big tree." Dobie laughed hysterically. "Step ahead a little, Miss Nellie Edna, an' you can see."

Nellie looked upward. The giant tulip-tree in which the wind sighed had a botanical name which would have delighted her ear and that of Cousin Dora; it was *Liriodendron tulipifera*. Nearby was a group of tall catalpas, a little farther on another bright green larch lifted its head above the native trees.

"Are we goin' on?" asked Stonewall.

"Yes," said Nellie Edna decidedly. "We are."

The path became more overgrown, the strange trees higher.

"These are ancient, ancient trees," said Nellie Edna.

They came upon the ruins of a building — at least, stone blocks lay heaped one upon another as though they had once composed a building. They walked on and came upon another and another. There had been bathing-houses and spring-houses, and large cottages for patrons and a fine house in which the Woodfills lived. Of all, only the Woodfill dwelling retained its original shape. It was an imposing man-

sion standing at the end of the road, in wretched repair but still sheltering human beings.

"There doesn't seem to be anyone here," said Nellie Edna. "How damp it is!"

"Are we goin' on?" asked Stonewall.

"A little farther," said Nellie Edna, her heart jumping. It was better to go and inquire for Carter Wythe Woodfill than to turn away and have him follow them, perhaps thinking they were evil-intentioned intruders.

"I see somebody!" said Dobie in a whisper, and with a tighter clutch. "On the steps! It's Ol' Auntie!"

From the broken steps rose a little old woman. She stood looking at them, bright-eyed and curious, and at once came forward as if to welcome them. She was, as Lightfoot said, an ancient woman, so ancient that she had become again a child.

"Good afternoon." Nellie Edna gave their names. "We came to speak to your nephew. Is he about?"

There was no light of intelligence in the sunken eyes of the old woman. She came still closer, and with each step the grasp of the Briscoes upon Nellie Edna grew more painful. She asked, not exactly the question which Lightfoot said she asked, but one which was similar. "How long does it take for a man to die?"



*"How Long Does it Take for a Man to Die?" Asked
Old Auntie*



"I don't know," answered Nellie Edna. "Do you mean someone who's been sick?"

Old Auntie shook her head with a sort of resignation as though she had not expected a satisfying response. She turned back toward the porch and sat down, but immediately rose again and came forward.

"How long does it take for a man to die?" she repeated; then, without waiting for an answer she trotted back to her place.

"Are we goin' on?" inquired Dobie.

Nellie Edna bit her lip. If only she had not come! What would Carter Wythe Woodfill think if he found her staring at his house? She would write him a letter—that would be the sensible procedure. Was the light fading?—no, that was impossible. She heard the wind sighing overhead. There were other tall, strange trees, hidden by the lower foliage. She remembered her cruel sarcasm.

"You goin' home?" asked Stonewall.

"Yes," said she.

Turning, she started toward the road, then stopped short. Down the tunnel-like opening came Carter; quickening his steps he looked amazed at his visitors. On one arm he carried a heavy basket, in the other hand he held a thick stick. His cheeks grew scarlet, he lifted his head.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he asked.

Nellie Edna stood dumbfounded, beside her Dobie and Stonewall stood equally paralyzed. Hand in hand they blocked the path of Carter to his own house. Behind them sounded light footsteps and a gentle voice.

"How long does it take for a man to die?" asked old Auntie, and received no answer.

"Perhaps you've come to spy out the land?" continued Carter. "You're welcome to see everything there is."

At last Nellie Edna found her tongue.

"I came to see you," she faltered, holding tight to a Briscoe with each hand. "I came to say I'd been rude and I was sorry. I'd never taught school and I heard of big boys who attend only to tease the teacher and annoy the young children. When you came in, I was scared, simply" — Nellie Edna smiled, then laughed — "simply scared to death. I thought you were making fun of me before my pupils."

Carter Wythe Woodfill set down his basket. Nellie Edna saw his eyes clearly — they were kind, not sharp and piercing.

"Oh, far from that!" said he, earnestly. "Far from that!"

"I can teach these boys," said Nellie Edna. "But I couldn't teach you."

"I'm not so sure!"

"Do you forgive me?"

"I do, indeed! Do you forgive me for scaring you to death?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

The moment threatened to become sentimental, if not openly tearful and embarrassing. Carter shifted his stick and held out his hand. "Let us shake hands and then forget it."

Stonewall and Dobie held out their hands.

"You're willing to forget, too, are you?" said Carter.

"Suah!" answered Dobie and Stonewall in chorus.

"We've been admiring your trees," said Nellie Edna. "I never saw such grand and beautiful trees. I don't know their names."

"Perhaps you'd like to walk about?"

The eyes of the Briscoes danced.

"We would," said Nellie Edna.

Old Auntie had returned to her place on the step. She now rose and trotted forward.

"You sit still, Auntie," said Carter gently. "We'll come and talk to you by and by."

Carter set his basket on the tumbledown porch and led them round the house to what had once been a

lawn. Here the undergrowth had been kept down and the thickness of the great trunks was visible. Magnificent magnolias, native to a more southern latitude, were sheltered by the mountainside and had become acclimated. Giant crêpe myrtle bushes with flowers deepening from rose to red still bore a few late blossoms; on tall bushes there were small scentless flowers like red roses.

"This was the first resort west of the Blue Ridge," explained Carter. "There were sulphur springs, both hot and cold, which were supposed to have high medicinal value. The patrons came from the tide-water cities, the younger ones on horseback with their belongings following in wagons, the older people or invalids in coaches. There was only one road over the mountain from the west, that from Newmarket, and this road was built out to meet it. There were as many as a hundred guests at a time, and their servants numbered many more. Their quarters were on the far side of the house, and down the hill.

"The foreign trees were all planted with a view to making the park more attractive and interesting. Some died, many lived, as you see. The place was begun a hundred years ago. There's a catalpa, those tremendous trees with the fernlike leaves are ailanthus, there are four varieties of magnolia besides the native species. Those pale green trees that look like

evergreens are larches. There are many varieties of real evergreens: the finest are the white pine. I used to know them all; my mother and grandmother taught me their names. This is a warm valley and the soil is fairly rich; plants will flourish here that would soon die elsewhere."

A convulsion of merriment threatened Nellie Edna's composure. "Can you spell 'cat' and 'rat'?" she asked.

"I can," laughed Carter. "Wasn't I funny?"

"Do you live here all alone?"

"Except for Old Auntie."

"Lightfoot Briscoe said the springs had gone dry."

"They have. But it was the war that ruined us. My people who kept the place and the people who patronized it—all the men were gone, all their property was lost."

"What made the springs go dry?"

"I don't know. My opulent neighbors who have the cave have done a good deal of clearing out of passageways and other experimentation. A slight slip in the ground might open a passage which the water would prefer."

"Perhaps you have a cavern!"

"Perhaps I do! In all probability I do! But I have no hundred thousand dollars or more with which to develop it."

"It's far more beautiful and interesting here than over there."

"I suppose it is. It is to me at any rate."

Dobie and Stonewall had pranced to the edge of the cleared space and Nellie Edna called them back.

"Would you like to look into the house?" asked Carter.

"If you wish us to," said Nellie Edna.

They entered through a broad door directly from the lawn. On one side of the hall was a drawing-room immense in size and scantily furnished with ancient furniture; on the other were two rooms. Carter opened a door nearest at hand.

"This used to be the library. Back of it was the dining-room. We use the dining-room now for living-room and kitchen, and in winter Auntie sleeps there because it's warm."

"How many books you have!" gasped Nellie Edna, walking from case to case. "Shakespeare," she read, "Addison, Sterne."

"There's nothing there which wasn't published a hundred years before you were born," said Carter.

"Here are French books, and German books and books on Chemistry!" Nellie Edna made no effort to read the titles; she tried only the names of the authors — Berzelius, Fresenius, Erdmann.

"Those belonged to Old Auntie's husband," ex-

plained Carter. "He was a German, a scientist who came to the University to teach. His name was Fogsang. He was what my neighbor calls a 'casuality' in the war."

Nellie Edna glanced into the next room. She saw, as in the Briscoe cabin, both a deep fireplace and a stove. In the doorway hung, in addition to the door, a gate made of slats of wood.

"When I go away on errands in cold weather I close the gate, and Auntie sits in here," explained Carter.

As though she heard her name, Auntie appeared before them, stepping softly.

"Can you tell me how long it takes a man to die?" she asked.

"I don't know, Auntie."

Carter stepped toward the outer door.

"I don't know what she means," he said. "No one knows. She's been in this condition for sixty years."

"For sixty years!"

"Ever since the war and the disappearance of her husband. There was something about him not quite straight; there were rumors that he sympathized with the North and that he went north."

"Where did you get?"—they came out on the porch; there were now unmistakable evidences that

evening was at hand — “where did you get your education?”

“My education?”

“You speak beautifully,” said Nellie Edna earnestly. “Once some people stopped at our house in the Valley to get lunch — one was a professor at the University, one was an Englishman, they spoke easily and used the right words. You speak like them. You’re” — Nellie Edna sought for adjectives with which to designate what Carter Wythe Woodfill was — “you’re intelligent and — and polished.”

“Oh, am I?” Carter laughed, incredulously. “No one ever told me that! I’ve had a queer education. My mother lived until I was fifteen; she taught me and then I taught myself.”

“From these old books?”

“From these old books.”

Nellie Edna summoned the Briscoes. “Dobie! Stonewall! Come now! I’d better apply to you for instruction,” she said to Carter.

Carter smiled again. “Don’t tell these rascals that! They’d laugh at you.”

Old Auntie tottered forward to meet them as they went round the house. “Can you tell me —”

Carter laid his hand on her arm. “Go and sit down, Auntie,” he said gently. “I’d walk briskly if I were you,” he advised Nellie Edna. “My neigh-

bors wouldn't do you any harm, but it might alarm you to come on them in the twilight."

"You mean the Kings?" asked Dobie. "We saw Lute goin' out as we come in."

"He'll probably be coming in as you go out," answered Carter. "He won't hurt you, just keep out of his way. I'd go along, but at this hour Auntie's always afraid. I'll walk with you a little distance."

Nellie Edna looked up. Carter stepped out at her side.

"How long does it take for a man to die?" Old Auntie's question was a wail, as though she protested against Carter's leaving her, and had no other words in which to express her dismay.

Nellie Edna halted at the entrance to the tunnel-like road. "Don't come farther with us," she said. She looked up again — she saw that Carter was not only forlorn but handsome. "We'll go on quickly."

"That was the spring-house." Carter pointed to the lower ground where stood a building which had escaped Nellie Edna's eye. "That's the best preserved of all the buildings — it has a door, and shutters which cover the windows, closed so long that I don't believe they could be opened."

"Have you never tried?"

Carter shrugged his shoulders. "It would be like

pursuing a departed love, if you mean I should go after the spring! ”

Again Nellie Edna looked up.

“ You’re doing yourself a wrong! ” she cried. “ You oughtn’t to stay here! Or you ought to do something with your ” — exact words were becoming Nellie Edna’s property by some mysterious process — “ with your resources. You have this beautiful place, these strange and wonderful trees. Why don’t you try to find your springs? ”

“ And invite them once more to bubble upward? ” laughed Carter.

“ I’d find something! ” said Nellie Edna. “ You have to make your luck. I was asleep, dull, stupid, and somebody said that to me. I began to know that I had a brain. It woke me, I saw myself as others see me.”

“ And that’s what you’d like me to do? ” Carter spoke quietly and with amusement.

With a boy on each side Nellie Edna hurried toward the opening in the thick wall. “ Good-bye! ” she called, and had no answer.

“ Are we afraid? ” gasped Dobie, alarmed at her haste.

“ No! ” said she. In another second she heard a voice and running footsteps. “ Miss Strickhouser! Miss Strickhouser! ” It was an awkward name to

shout; even Carter found it impossible to make it musical. She stood still and Carter came up panting.

"I'm obliged to you for your interest," said he. "Sometime I'll talk to you. I'll see what I can do to please you." Nellie Edna detected not only amusement in his tone, there was mockery.

"You're doing wrong!" she cried. "You're doing wrong!"

The way out seemed shorter than the way in, taken as it was with flying steps. There was still light enough to see comfortably until they reached the neighborhood of the Briscoe house. The wind had a new sound; it seemed to blow among leaves which had lost summer's moisture under the October sun.

"It's a sort of lonely night," said Dobie.

"If we hear somethin' awful cryin', it's nothin' but an owl," whispered Stonewall.

"There's the light!" shouted Dobie at last. "There's the light! There's Ma movin' round! There's li'l Woodfill!"

Woodfill came running forward to take Nellie Edna's hand. Together the boys shouted out their news. "We were at Cahtah's Wythe Woodfill's! We saw Ol' Auntie! She didn't hurt us! She talked to us! We talked to her! We was all about everywhere!"

"Were all about," corrected Nellie Edna.

"It ce'tainly does please me when you sets my children right, Miss Nellie Edna," said Cousin Dora, approaching the stove. "Suppah's on the hob. Ain't that a forlorn place?"

"It is, indeed."

"I ain't seen it for many a long day, but it was bad enough then. An' you saw Ol' Auntie?"

"Yes. She's a poor, harmless soul."

"She is that. If I'd known you was projectin' to go that way, I'd sent a gift along. I guess she asked you how long it took to die."

"She did."

Sitting in the corner, Lightfoot was putting a new string on his fiddle. "That's what she's been askin' fo' sixty yeahs, since the wah," he said. "Her husband were a casualty, he were. She's goin' to find out soon how long it takes to die."

"She said, 'How long does it take a man to die?'" corrected Nellie Edna.

"Is that what she says? Well, I guess she means any human." Lightfoot lifted the fiddle and settled it under his chin.

Nellie Edna went into her room. She saw the black eyes of Carter Woodfill — they laughed at her and mocked her, but they were none the less pathetic.

"I might tell Professor Abernethy about him," she thought. "He might help him."

"Suppah!" called Cousin Dora, who also revelled in the comic strips. "Whar in the name of sense is them Cap Stubbses? Mom and Gran'ma Stubbs had only one; I have three. Come on to eat! Basin?"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Dobie and Stonewall together.

Cousin Dora flourished her frying-pan. "When we folks butchah, you an' the boys kin take some hog-meat to Cahtah and his Ol' Auntie," she said. "Hog-meat'll taste good to 'em."

"Cahtah's a good boy," declared Lightfoot. "They say the hill folks is bad, but that ain't the truth. If Cahtah was a bad boy, he'd leave Ol' Auntie or put her away an' go down to the college an' git an education. But he stays an' keeps watch on her. We ain't got any bad folks but the Kings, an' they's strangahs, an' the officahs have an eye on them all the time. The officahs is all about; I seen a couple round today."

"Suppah!" called Cousin Dora again. "Now set up, each an' all."

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST of the cold weather came to the Briscoe's neighborhood in the middle of November. Cousin Dora had visited the store with her boys and had brought them back shod.

"Last yeah's shoes are gone like last yeah's snows," declared she. "Nothin' left to hand down from Dobie to Stonewall, still less Stonewall to Woodfill. I ce'tainly do hate to send these new shoes to school but I can't do nothin' else. If you wasn't payin' bo'd, Miss Nellie Edna, I don't know what would happen. Trouble is, by mid-wintah tops an' soles won't be holdin' togethah any mo'."

In the last week of November the Briscoes butchered, and the adult squeals and grunts of Tom and Jennie were heard no more. It was a time of fierce activity, Cousin Dora moved like a whirlwind as she directed her assistants. All rose early in the morning and Dobie's and Stonewall's remaining away from school was seriously discussed and in the end decided against.

"We kin git along, Lightfoot an' I," said Cousin Dora. "They might miss somethin' they'd never git agin. Tomorrow's Sataday, then all boys kin help with the clearin' up, an' in the afternoon you kin carry a present of nice hog-meat to Cahtah Wythe Woodfill an' his Auntie."

Saturday afternoon was cold and the sky lowering. Cousin Dora prophesied snow and directed them not to linger.

"Only once I knew wintah to shut down so soon as this," she said. "It didn't let up, neithah. Snow, snow, snow, rain, rain, rain. When the uppah roads wasn't blocked off by snow, the bottoms was drowned out by rain. Now clear out, an' when yo' git back, you'll git back to o'dah an' not to confusion."

Nellie Edna wore her last winter's coat which was brown with a fur collar. "There's where you'll save," Aunt Myra had said. "It's no use gettin' a new coat for mountaineers." Aunt Myra had not yet found Nellie Edna a school in the Valley, though every letter spoke of her efforts. "Somebody'll get married or give up," she prophesied. "Then I'll see you get the first chance."

Whether the coat was old or new, the Briscoes viewed it with admiration. They stood in a circle while Nellie Edna put it on and Dobie and Stonewall made comments upon it as they walked through the

woods. Nellie Edna carried an old basket and Stonewall and Dobie each a tin pail. The basket, which was both beautiful and substantial in design, was woven by Lightfoot who had inherited the art from his father.

While they walked, the boys sang. When they reached the point where the road separated from the road to the caverns and proceeded along the ridge toward the Woodfills', they ceased suddenly.

"Why don't you keep on?" asked Nellie Edna.

"I like to keep my ears open," said Dobie with a little laugh.

The thickness of the wall of verdure was amazing; one could see little farther than in summer. Many of the oaks still held their leaves, and amid other deciduous trees whose leaves were gone stood evergreens hitherto unseen. As they approached nearer to the Woodfills' the growth thickened. The springhouse was visible but the other buildings were almost as well covered as in summer. As in summer, the dwelling was hidden until they were almost upon it.

Again they approached from the rear. Now, however, no little old woman sat on the doorstep, her hair on her shoulders. Doors and windows were closed; neither house nor premises showed a sign of life, except a faint trail of smoke from the chimney. The boys stepped closer to Nellie Edna.

"Are we goin' in?" asked Dobie.

"Of course we are!" Nellie Edna spoke in an unnaturally loud tone. "Why not? You might sing a tune and warn them that we're coming."

"What tune?" asked Dobie.

"A lively one."

Dobie began, "My gal's a blue-eyed daisy," but he sang without energy, as though he were still trying to keep his ears open.

Nellie Edna knocked at the door — there was no answer. She knocked again. "Call, Dobie!"

Dobie called loudly, "Cahtah! Cahtah!" There was still no answer.

Nellie Edna looked in the window. "We can't leave the butchering on the doorstep," said she. "It will freeze. There's no one in the kitchen, but Old Auntie is sitting in the doorway which goes into the library. The gate is closed and she's on the other side."

"Cahtah don't want her near the fiah, that's what I think," said Dobie.

"An' I," echoed Stonewall.

"We'll go round to the front door," said Nellie Edna.

They rapped again and again on the front door and all three called "Auntie! Auntie!" At last Nellie Edna opened the door and went in. The hall was

cold, all the doors leading into it were closed. She called again, but there was no answer and she laid her hand on the door of the library. In the lock was a key which was turned. "I don't know what to do," said she. She walked down the hall — the door of the kitchen was closed but not locked; opening it, she could see Old Auntie clearly. Old Auntie saw her; she lifted her head with her childish, pleasant smile, not seeming to be in the least embarrassed by her strange situation.

"We brought you some butchering," announced Nellie Edna. "We'll leave it here in the hall where it's cool."

Old Auntie did not even ask her usual question, she bent her head and seemed to be looking at her folded hands.

"We'll have to put the things here on the table," went on Nellie Edna. "They're all wrapped up. Then we can take the pails and basket with us. I guess we'd better not wait any longer."

"We'll meet Cahtah as we go out," prophesied Dobie. "He'll be comin' home. It gets da'k early these days."

The boys hurried out the door and, moving more slowly, Nellie Edna followed them. She crossed the open space and looked back at the house. It was more than ever grim, forbidding, lonely. She pressed her

hand to her side; her heart was heavy, as though weighted down. "What ails me!" she said sharply to herself.

In the road Dobie and Stonewall again walked close beside her. They did not sing, nor did she suggest singing.

"There's somebody comin'," whispered Dobie. "I guess it's Cahtah."

It was not Carter, it was a stranger. "Good evening," said Nellie Edna quickly.

Without answering the man dropped down into the woods.

"It was a King," said Dobie in awe. "It was Jack King. He's worse than Lute King."

"He won't hurt you." Nellie Edna was not only nervous, she was irritated. "How foolish I am!" she said to herself. "Carter's nothing to me. Nothing at all."

Cousin Dora sat in the rocking-chair in an attitude of exhaustion.

"Well?" said she.

"He wasn't at home," answered Dobie.

"We looked in and Old Auntie was sitting in the doorway behind a gate like a grating," explained Nellie Edna. "It's fixed so she can get heat and not be near the fire."

"I guess that's it," said Cousin Dora. "Cahtah's

a smaht boy. He has more brains than any boy I know. I guess he went to the store. An' you didn't meet him comin' out?"

"No."

"I'll git the suppah," said Cousin Dora. "Then you boys'll have to clean up."

"I'll get the supper," offered Nellie Edna. "You sit still."

Cousin Dora accepted with a grateful sigh. "Go ahead," said she with a wave of her hand. "Thar's the fryin'-pan and thar's riches of hog-meat to draw from. Don't do any fancy cookin' though, or they won't have me back. Aftah suppah, I'm goin' to retu'n to this chaiah an' set till bed-time. Li'l Wood-fill's goin' to set in my lap, an' Pappy's goin' to play the fiddle."

Lightfoot stepped in, a basket on his arm. Like the basket Nellie Edna had carried, it was shapely but ready to fall to pieces and tied with a string. "It's gittin' cold," sighed he. "It's gittin' ready to snow, that's my opinion."

"Did you see Cahtah at the store?" inquired Dobie.

"No," said Lightfoot. "But I seen his fresh smoke as I passed the high p'int. I seen his smoke an' the Kings' smoke."

"Look at her fixin' the table so nice!" exclaimed Cousin Dora. "What you goin' to make, honey?"

"Muffins," said Nellie Edna.

"That's a new wo'd to me," laughed Lightfoot. "It tastes kinda good. I miss them Tom an' Jennie hogs, I do." He sighed again. "How I wish they was somethin' to do in wintah!"

"You kin make you a basket," suggested Cousin Dora. "That would take some little time."

"'Bout a day," said Lightfoot in a discouraged tone. "I was countin' some on that. I got lots o' splints ready."

"You might make baskets to sell," suggested Nellie Edna.

"Make baskets to sell!" repeated Lightfoot.

"What!" said Cousin Dora.

"Your baskets are beautiful," declared Nellie Edna. "I never saw any like them. Why don't you make some and take them down to Aunt Myra's? I believe they could easily be sold."

Lightfoot stood open-mouthed. Cousin Dora sat erect. Wildly excited, she interchanged her consonants. "Basticks!" said she. "Why, we could all make basticks if they could be sold! You mean you think we could sell basticks!"

"Indeed I do!"

Cousin Dora sprang to her feet. "I'll help with the suppah. When it's et an' cleaned away, then we'll make ou' plans. If we could" — she sat down weakly

— “if we could make a couple o’ dollahs fo’ only one set o’ shoes, it would help. Lightfoot, he could teach the boys, then he could have what he makes, an’ Dobie what he makes, an’ Stonewall what he makes, an’ li’l Woodfill, he would have to git some pay fo’ handlin’ splints an’ sich an’ doin’ things fo’ the big boys while they was makin’ basticks. Why” — when Cousin Dora was profoundly moved either by joy or sorrow she covered her face with her apron; now she tossed it over her head and from beneath issued incoherent words, among them the word “college.”

“You got to soak the splints first,” said Lightfoot. “As I said, I got lots ready.”

The splints were found and put to soak, then Lightfoot played his fiddle and the boys sang. Cousin Dora sat almost asleep in the rocking-chair. Woodfill lay quite asleep in her arms. Nellie Edna stepped outside the door. White flakes were drifting down, she could see them in the lighted space outside the window. She could see in imagination a column of smoke rising against the sky. Carter would come to thank Cousin Dora, but perhaps he would come when she was in school! Inside her breast was confusion and pain, as though, like her mind, her heart were awakening.

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS Saturday morning and the Briscoe kitchen was intensely warm. Fire blazed in the stove and steam issued from a large boiler. In the middle of the floor stood a tub, on the stairway sat Dobie, Stonewall, and Woodfill in various stages of undress. At the door stood Lightfoot and toward him all eyes were directed. Over his blue shirt he wore a short coat lined with sheepskin, bought like the boys' sweaters from government supplies sent to country stores. In his hand and held horizontally was a staff upon which hung five baskets of varying size. They were woven with perfect regularity, their shape was graceful. Round the edge of several ran an open-work border. From outside the house came a loud braying, so near that Old Slow seemed about to enter.

"He's callin'," said Cousin Dora in excitement. "He wants you to git off. You got a long way to go, Lightfoot. I don't expec' you back till tomorrow."

"Perhaps I'll hitch him at the cave'ns, an' take my baskets on my staff an' walk on," planned Lightfoot.

"If he's too slow, that's what I'll do. I wouldn't take him along at all if he didn't need exe'cise."

"I'll git the week's bathin' done," planned Cousin Dora. "Then we kin set to wo'k. Miss Nellie Edna, she says she's goin' to weave too sometime. Now if by luck you should sell a bastick, Lightfoot, hide yo' money, that's all I've got to say."

"I will," promised Lightfoot. "I'll hide it good. But I don' expec' no money today. Good-bye, all." Lightfoot stepped out and Cousin Dora followed to help him pack the baskets in the buggy.

She came back and stood perfectly still inside the door. The boys looked at her in surprise. "If you want to know what I was doin'," said she, "I was prayin'."

All morning Cousin Dora went about with a solemn air. The boys had their baths and put on clean home-made underwear and over it their worn clothes, then they sat down with their splints. There was something promising about the Briscoes, all they seemed to need was a start.

"I don't mean evah to move altogethah away from Stony Man," said Cousin Dora. "If you take the mountain people away from home, they die. But I would like to git away more than once a summah an' go fa'thah than Cousin Sam an' Hallie Briscoes' an' see some different kinds of folks. I'd like to see one

general an' one professor such as you seen, Miss Nellie Edna, befo' I die. I would like my boys to have the chance to git away. Now I'll stop my talkin'. What you talk too much about, you spoil."

But Cousin Dora could not stop talking. In the middle of the morning she opened Nellie Edna's door. "I don't like to interrupt you, honey, but what did you think them basticks might sell at?"

"I wrote to Cousin Myra not to ask less than a dollar for the smallest one," answered Nellie Edna. "She'll put a price on them. And get it!" she added.

"I'll bet she will!" roared Cousin Dora. "If they's anybody in all the world that wants a mountain bastick an' he comes down the Valley pike, Aunt Myra, she'll sell it to him."

Before noon Cousin Dora appeared again.

"I can't settle to nothin'," she said. "It's long to wait till tomorrow."

"Perhaps it won't be tomorrow," said Nellie Edna. "If he ties Old Slow at the caverns and walks, a car may give him a lift."

"That's true," agreed Cousin Dora.

As the clock on the kitchen mantel struck twelve, Cousin Dora opened the door again. She said nothing, and Nellie Edna looked up from her algebra. Cousin Dora leaned against the wall, pale as a sheet.

"What's the matter?"

"He's comin', Lightfoot's comin'. We hear Ol' Slow, an' the boys is gone to the tu'n of the road."

"Perhaps he sold them."

"They's no mahket for basticks in the wildaness!" groaned Cousin Dora.

"He couldn't have been robbed!" exclaimed Nellie Edna.

"His courage failed him," Cousin Dora spoke fiercely. "Next time I'll take them. Oh, my! Oh, my!"

Nellie Edna went to the door and looked at the opening up which the head of Old Slow was due to appear. Before his white face showed, he sang his loud song.

"Ol' Slow's courage ain't failed him!" said Cousin Dora grimly.

The boys were trying to clamber into the buggy, Lightfoot was waving them away. "Wait!" he commanded. "Wait!"

"He looks sick," said Cousin Dora. "That's how he looks to me."

"Perhaps he is sick," suggested Nellie Edna. "I guess that's it, he had to turn back."

The boys came directly into the house.

"Somethin' ails Pappy," said Dobie.

"He spoke mighty ha'sh to me," whimpered Stonewall.

"He said, 'Git out of this, will ye?' " mocked little Woodfill.

"Hush!" ordered Cousin Dora sternly. "Dobie, go an' help your pa."

"He said to stay away."

Cousin Dora herself went across the clearing to the stable. "What in time ails you, Lightfoot?" she called.

Lightfoot's answer could be heard in the kitchen. "Wait!" he shouted. "Didn't I say to wait?"

Returning, Cousin Dora looked at Nellie Edna and shook her head, then she walked toward the stove and laid her hand on the frying-pan as though to reassure herself by the touch of some familiar thing. The door opened and Lightfoot came in. He did not carry his staff horizontally or use it for a cane, he bore it jauntily on his shoulder. He closed the door behind him and, standing with his back against it, looked round at his family.

"You said wait," said Cousin Dora. "That's what we're doin'."

Lightfoot pointed with his staff to the rocking-chair. "Set down," he ordered.

Cousin Dora obeyed, her lips parted, her step tottering. Lightfoot put his hand into the pocket of his shirt. "You told me, 'Hide it good,'" said he. "I buttoned it in. Kin you ketch?"

Cousin Dora's paralyzed hands remained folded in her lap while upon them landed a small roll of greenbacks. She looked down at them as though they might bite her.

"Did you sell 'em, Pappy?" asked Stonewall.

"Where did you sell 'em?" asked Dobie.

"You weren't in the Valley!" said Nellie Edna.

"I war not in the Valley," said Lightfoot. "I war at the cave'ns. I stopped to tie Ol' Slow an' the boss says to me — 'Whar,' he says, 'did you git them fine baskets?' Says I, 'I made 'em.' 'Will you sell 'em?' says he. 'I might,' I says, 'if I git my price.' 'Well,' says he, 'what's your price?' 'The smallest is two dollahs,' I says. 'The rest is acco'din'.' He says he kin sell all an' more. All I kin make he'll sell. He says he thought this ol' aht was no more, that's what he called it. Now, Dora, I ate a good breakfast, but it hasn't stood by me."

Cousin Dora counted the bills. "Heah is twelve dollahs!" said she solemnly. "Twelve dollahs! So much money I ain't had in my han's at one time since I was bo'n." She rose to her feet and looked about until her eye rested upon Nellie Edna. "I said many times, it was a happy day when I went visitin' Myra Funkhousah. An' that I say agin."

CHAPTER XIV

NELLIE EDNA opened the door of the Briscoe cabin. Behind her all was quiet and deserted. Old Slow had been hitched up again and together Lightfoot and Dora and their offspring had driven to the store. Eight dollars had been hidden under the roofbeams of the cabin, four had been carried with them to buy supplies. Their ideas were not extravagant—flour was on their memorandum and so were sugar and coffee and baking-powder. The only luxury which they meant to purchase was a mouth-organ for Woodfill. They had invited Nellie Edna to go with them, but she had declined. Life in the cabin was crowded, it would be pleasant to be for a while alone.

When, rejoicing in her freedom, she had performed various Saturday tasks, she sat down. She had studied all the morning and her eyes were tired. The sunshine invited and she put on her coat and hat and stepped out. She would walk about the clearing and after a while she would go down the road to meet the Briscoes.

She walked a few paces and stopped and listened, a few more, and stopped and listened again; then, flushing red, she strode on more briskly, rustling the leaves as she stepped. Carter Wythe Woodfill had not come either to see her or to thank Cousin Dora for her generous gift. Cousin Dora cherished no ill feeling. "He can't git away," she said. "Deah knows how Auntie is! I'm goin' to send the boys ovah to inquiah. I would 'a' sent them soonah but they's so crazy 'bout this bastick-makin' since they's to have their own money that I can't pry 'em loose."

Patches of snow lay in the woods, but they were fast disappearing. Lightfoot had theories about the winter; the pelts of the squirrels were thick — that meant continued cold. When one of the boys said, "But 'taint cold yit, Pappy!" he answered, "Wait till the bend of the year, then you'll see cold."

There were now not many squirrels to serve as indications of the weather; the Briscoes had lived upon squirrels and rabbits. "When squirrels an' rabbits is plenty, then we kin save hog-meat," said Cousin Dora. She sighed. "Things is almost too easy. A good teachah, an' money bein' earned in wintah, and company in the house to pass the long months. It can't last, somethin'll happen."

Nellie Edna went a few yards down the road and

stopped and looked about once more. There was no sound except the caw of a crow; she liked the silence and the fresh air. The air was, as the Briscoes said, far better on the mountain than in the Valley. She walked another short distance, and paused again. This time she did not stop so long; the Briscoes would soon be coming and she would not have her walk alone. She proceeded, without stopping, to the spot where the road toward the caverns separated from Carter Woodfill's road.

"I'll walk along a little way," said she to herself. "I won't go out of sight of this spot."

Keeping to her intention, she counted her paces and turned. At the intersection she listened — there was no sound; she turned again and again counted her paces. This time she added fifty. The third time she added a hundred and stood still. One could hear sounds for a long distance, so clear was the air. She could go a little farther and still be sure to hear the voices of the returning Briscoes who would be talking loudly and probably laughing. Possibly they would sing; she smiled absently and hummed:

*Down in the valley,
The valley so low,
Hang your head over,
Hear the wind blow.*

As she began the second stanza she heard a sound. Someone was walking along the road toward her, and, so far as she knew, only Carter Woodfill and the Kings used this road. She did not wish to meet the Kings when she was alone; still less did she wish to meet Carter Woodfill who did not wish to meet her. She looked about — at hand was a thicket of hemlock; she stepped into it.

The footsteps grew nearer, they were not brisk, but slow and heavy, and they were accompanied by a mumbling voice. A man came into view in a moment, muttering and talking to himself, and went on, on the road which she would have to take to return. His voice continued to sound, he halted a little distance away and apparently sat down. He seemed to be waiting for someone who was now a friend, now a foe. He said several times, "Why don't you come?" and again. "I've got him! I've got him!"

Nellie Edna steadied herself against the trunk of a tree. The man ceased to speak, but he had not moved away and she did not dare to pass him. She believed that she had come a long distance and that she was nearer the Woodfill park than the intersection of the roads. There was but one course to follow — that was to continue to the Woodfill place and, humiliating though it might be, to ask Carter to walk

a little way with her. She was certain that already the light was fading.

Winding between the close-grown stems of the thicket, she returned to the road far beyond where she had left it and halted, her heart thumping. The park was only a little farther on and she began to run, indifferent to the noise she made. She saw the tall larches, the bare branches of the lindens, the ruins of the bath-houses and the spring-house. Here were a few patches of snow; in the changing and softening light they were not white, but lavender. Coming suddenly upon the Woodfill house she saw no smoke from the chimney. Had they gone away? But Old Auntie could not go away!

Breathlessly she ran across the open space. No one responded to her loud knocking. The back door was locked as it had been on their last visit, the front door was open. She stepped into the dim hall and tried the door of the kitchen. It was locked, but the key was in the lock.

"Carter Woodfill!" she called. "Carter Woodfill!"

There was no answer.

"Auntie!" she called. "Auntie!" Again there was no answer. Panic-stricken, she opened the door and looked in.

Old Auntie sat in her chair close to the improvised

gate. She whimpered gently, but made no other answer. There was a faint warmth, but the fire was out.

"Where's Carter?" asked Nellie Edna.

Old Auntie shook her head, unable apparently to utter even her single sentence. Nellie Edna looked from table to stove, from stove to cupboard; there had been, she guessed, no one here for many hours. The heavy chunks of hickory were almost as hard as coal, but they had burned themselves out.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

Old Auntie replied only with a feeble moan. Stepping softly, with frequent glances over her shoulder, Nellie Edna built up the fire and finding bread, toasted it, and dampening it with water, carried it to Old Auntie, whose outstretched hands showed her hungry state.

She stepped into the hall and called again. A broad stairway led upward; shivering, she set her foot upon it. The step creaked, she stood still until the echo died away. She stepped upon another and waited again, and still another. From the upper hall windows she looked out into the trees.

"Carter!" she called. "Carter!"

The doors of the rooms were locked and she went down the stairs. She believed now that she heard a sound.

"This is Nellie Edna Strickhouser," she said loudly. "I'm in your house. I've made a fire." Her own words came back to her — "made a fire." Again she approached Old Auntie.

"Can't you tell me where Carter is? "

Warmed and fed, Old Auntie had fallen asleep.

"What had I better do? " asked Nellie Edna aloud. "The Briscoes will come home; they'll be frightened. But I can't go back along the road! " In imagination she saw the drunken man sitting by the tree. "What shall I do? "

She suddenly remembered the old spring-house — its door had always been closed; she believed that when she passed the door was open! She recalled in confusion her conversation with Carter in which she had been so full of advice. "Perhaps he's there, working! " said she. "But he wouldn't leave Old Auntie to freeze! to starve! "

Hurrying through the hall she ran round the house toward the opening into the road. Here was the long, low ruined building — the door was open! She stepped into a large room. At one end was a basin made of stone; the mortar in the seams had long since become powder, pipes leading into it and away from it were rusted. The floor was covered with a mass of débris, earth and stones and remnants of thick, decayed planks.

Someone had been digging in the floor — there was a large hole which led with a downward slant into the side of the hill. The pile of earth and stones and broken and rotted boards which had been removed was large, but not nearly large enough to have filled the great orifice; it could merely have blocked it up. She stepped nearer and looked down. The slant was gradual — it was not merely a tunnel, it was a tunnel with steps made of stones.

Her first thought was, "Why, Carter has a cavern!"

Her eyes became accustomed to the dark pit and she took another step. She looked down — all was black; she closed her eyes and opened them and looked again. She had seen four steps, she could now see eight. Nine! Ten! She counted still another — eleven! Strange odors filled her nostrils — what could they be? The Half-Moon Caverns had an odor which might be described by the word damp, this odor was a compound of mustiness and moisture and — could it be? — chemicals. Or was it alcohol? Or was it —

Her staring gaze was caught by a strange white spot. Again she shut her eyes and opened them. The steps ended in a pit, she could see a smooth floor, and the spot was close to the floor. It was — she could not be mistaken! — a human face atop of a long

body. It was Carter Woodfill, and he had doubtless fallen down the steps!

Instantly she started down. It was a wild and senseless thing to do, unrelated to any of Aunt Myra's precepts which bade one look after one's self first. In Nellie Edna's heart new impulses were astir. "I can't let him die!" she said, as if in answer to a protest. She took another step. "Carter!" She looked up, the heavenly light of day still shone upon her. "It will soon be dark!" She laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Carter!"

Instantly she withdrew her hand and stood erect, her face burning. Terrified, shocked, disgusted, she put her foot upon the step. "He's been drinking!" she said aloud, and turned to climb. "I'll go and hide in the woods or wait in the house. Lightfoot will surely come to find me and he can help him out."

With her foot on the step she looked back, though common sense directed her to depart instantly, to go in search of Lightfoot through the woods, to hide in the house, to do anything rather than linger. But she did none of these things. Filled with shame for Carter, she approached him once more. Perhaps he could be roused enough to make his own way up the steps.

"Carter!" she called. "Carter!"

There was a bruise on his cheek, no longer merely red or purple, but already blackening. Clearly he

had struck his head as he fell, and clearly he had been lying here for some time.

"Carter!" She tried to move him, but she could not move or rouse him. Suddenly, as she bent above him, her feet slipped and she began to slide, at first slowly, then more rapidly. Her descent was not abrupt, but gradual; if she could have caught a single projection, however small, she could have stopped her fall. But her grasping hands touched only soft, crumbling earth.

Many events of her life, as frequently happens to those who fall, passed before her eyes. She saw Aunt Myra and the pleasant house, the smoke-bush and the Crimson Rambler by the fence, the Virginia Creeper on the porch, and the faces of her friends. She heard even the wail of Lightfoot's fiddle and the gentle voice of little Woodfill singing about his brown-eyed girl.

She came at last to a halt, round her that Stygian darkness of which the guide to the Half-Moon Caverns had spoken so eloquently. She seemed to hear his very words. "The passage through which we entered is tortuous — a person imprisoned here might easily go round and round in the blackness until he became mad."

Then all pictures faded away; she sat on damp ground staring at blackness.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER a long time, Nellie Edna turned from a sitting to a kneeling posture. "I came down a slanting course," said she. "Surely I can creep back!" She crept a few feet, the floor was still flat. "If I can get to a wall, then I can go on, sure of finding my way."

The floor was moist, like the floor of the Half-Moon Caverns, but it was not actually wet. She crept a little farther — there was no wall, there was only a dreadful blackness.

"Surely I ought to be able to see where I came down!" She remembered that the spot where Carter lay was only dimly and indirectly lighted and she had apparently slipped far to the side.

"It's getting darker outside!" she thought despairingly. "Every minute it's getting darker!"

Again and again she closed and opened her eyes. The device did not help; with them closed, she saw stars and spinning Catharine-wheels, with them open she saw only blackness.

"And Carter Wythe Woodfill is" — she could not say the dreadful word. "He is — he is —"

Pressing her hand to her lips she sat crouching down. The air thickened, the odor of the mould grew heavier — what was it the guide had said — a million years? At this recollection Nellie Edna with difficulty suppressed a shriek. There were other odors besides mould, indescribable and queer. Alcohol — it was on her hands, in her hair, all about her; it remained, she believed, from her touch of Carter. She checked a sob, with her hands clapped over her mouth.

"He fell down," said she. "He didn't know what he was doing and he fell down. If he should come to, he might fall all the way." Closing her eyes she pictured the return of the Briscoes to the cabin. "They'll be talking and laughing, and suddenly they'll find I'm not there." She heard the voice of Woodfill, "Miss Nellie Edna! Miss Nellie Edna!" She had heard them whispering, they meant to bring her candy from the store. "Surely they'll come and find me!"

She had read of persons wringing their hands, and had had a vague wonder about the process. She began to wring her hands, pressing them tight one against the other, turning one upon the other as though she were pressing water from a cloth.

"I'm alone in the center of the earth!" She dared not put her thought into words. "But I'll not think of where I am; I'll think of the Briscoes. They must be home now. They'll say 'Where can she be?' and one of the boys will say, 'Perhaps she went to see Carter and Old Auntie.' They'll wait a little longer, and a little longer, and a little longer, then they'll start out and come here. But" — into Nellie Edna's mind came a terrible possibility — "they may not see that the door of the spring-house is open and I could scream forever; they may stand right above me; they may be standing above me now, and I couldn't make them hear! I can" — she turned once more upon her knees. "I can surely find a wall!"

She crept only a few feet before the top of her head touched a vertical surface. She turned again to a sitting posture and pressed the wall with her hand. She put her hand to her head.

"I've still got my hat. I'll lay it here and I'll creep a little way, then I can find it when I come back."

Carrying out her plan, she crept a dozen feet and believed it was much farther. Returning, she crept in the other direction for a longer distance, and believed she had gone only a short way. She came to an angle in the wall and crept round it.

"I can always get back," she said. The alcoholic

odor grew stronger, she believed that she was getting back toward Carter. "Oh!" she cried. Her weight rested upon her hand and she had leaned upon a cutting edge. She touched her hand with the other, blood ran from it. She felt about; the fragments could be only broken glass, some heavy, some delicate and thin. She reached frantically for the wall she had lost, and her hand came into contact with another small object, made of metal and like a button in shape. Absently she put it into her pocket. She felt about again and found still another small object.

"It's a stone," she said hoarsely. "A queer stone!"

She heard a sound and stood up to listen. It was the murmur of running water, more copious than that in the Half-Moon Caverns — could it be Carter's spring? Her heart leaped — perhaps she had helped Carter to rediscover his spring? Then it sank again as she remembered his helpless figure. Blood rushed to her cheeks; she felt them burning in the darkness. "I came to find him," she confessed to herself. "And he's" — still she could not utter the dreadful word. "I'm ashamed! I'm ashamed! I'm alone in the center of the earth!" she cried, this time not wordlessly but aloud. "I'm — alone — in — the — center — of — the — earth!"

Sobbing hysterically, she crept back along the wall, round the angle, along the other wall, till she reached

her hat. The smell of alcohol was still strong, it seemed to rush upon her in sickening waves. It was not only alcohol, there was combined with it another odor stronger and foul, that of corn-whiskey mash.

"I'm not alone in the center of the earth," she said, stifling another shriek.

She stood up and leaned her shoulder against the wall, pressing her hands to her cheeks. She heard clearly once more the sound of running water, she smelled the alcoholic fumes, which were far too strong to emanate from one drunken boy, she heard a muttering voice, saw in the distance a dim light. She held her breath — there was a faint voice coming from another direction — or did she imagine both voices and light? The voice spoke familiar words; it was muffled as though by distance, or by the rocky barrier against whose moist and dripping surface she was leaning.

"The passage through which we entered is tortuous, a person imprisoned here might easily go round and round in the blackness until he became mad."

The other muttering voice grew loud, it spoke in oaths.

"Oh, help me!" cried Nellie Edna toward the moist and dripping wall. "Help me!"

The light grew brighter, illuminating an enormous mushroom-shaped stalactite hanging from the ceiling,

the clay-colored floor, and an advancing figure. It was not the young guide, though for an instant Nellie Edna believed she was saved, it was Lute King whom she had passed in the road, now somewhat recovered from his confusion.

"Hold your noise!" he ordered with another oath. "What are you doing here?"

"I don't want to be here," protested Nellie Edna. "I fell down by accident. I'll be only too glad to get out." In her excitement she used one of Aunt Myra's favorite expressions, "Believe me! All I want is to get out."

"How did you get in?"

"I came to Woodfill's and I looked into the old spring-house and I saw Carter lying there. I thought he was hurt and I'd help him, and I fell. If you show me how to get up again, I'll go gladly."

The man stared at her sullenly.

"The Briscoes will surely come to find me," said Nellie Edna. "You might just as well let me go."

"I might just as well let you stay."

"Lightfoot Briscoe says there are officers all about," said Nellie Edna.

Instantly an alarming change darkened the face of King. With clenched fist, he came close. "You say a word to any officer and your life won't be worth that!" He snapped his finger in her face. "You —"



"Oh, Help Me!" Cried Nellie Edna. "Help Me!"



A muffled voice spoke again at Nellie Edna's ear. Her memory filled in the unintelligible words. "Beyond, the hand of the Creator says 'Stay!' Here begin to rise the eternal walls of the solid mountain. The passage through which we entered is tortuous — a person might go round and round until he became mad. Shall I turn on the lights?" The voice was not that of the guide who had taken her down, but another; his words, however, were the same.

"Help!" called Nellie Edna. "Help!" She believed that she uttered a shriek; in reality she uttered a whimper only a little louder than Old Auntie's.

Instantly King laid hold of her arm. His grasp was cruel; uttering another cry, she tore herself away and started to run. His foot shot out and tripped her and she fell, striking her head against a projecting rock.

"You will, will you?" said he. Bending over her, he threw into her face the light of his lantern. It was a crude affair made of a candle set into a board and shielded from the air on all but one side by pieces of pasteboard.

"Get up," he commanded.

Nellie Edna neither heard nor answered.

"Get up!" he repeated.

When still Nellie Edna lay motionless, he turned

back toward the angle round which he had come. In a few moments he reappeared, followed by his brother Jack. He was taller than Lute and the light threw his dim and gigantic shadow on walls and ceiling.

"Pick her up," he ordered in a tone scarcely louder than a whisper and with his eyes upon the wall beyond which could be heard laughter and light alarmed shrieks. "I'll take the light."

"Why don't you leave her here?" asked Lute.

"Pick her up," Jack repeated. "Want her to git out, an' hunt up the officers?"

Lute lifted Nellie Edna and laid her over his shoulder like a sack of grain. She uttered a moan and lay limply. The two men walked along a passageway, leaving behind them once more the Stygian darkness which the guides so eloquently described. All was dark, but all was not still. From one direction there sounded at intervals muffled voices, now speaking in lengthy paragraphs, now raised in light laughter; from the other came a faint, never-ending murmur of water.

CHAPTER XVI

NELLIE EDNA lay upon her back on a bed, if so confused a mass of soiled straw-stuffed tick and ancient woven coverlets could be called a bed. She was in a low cave with an arched ceiling blackened by smoke. The room was dimly lighted and the light shone on dull surfaces of corroded copper and tin and on a rickety table on which lay two revolvers. On a stove stood a large closed vessel, rectangular in shape; from it a pipe extended to another vessel which had once been used by a farmer to ship milk to a creamery. A spigot had been set in the side, and what the can now contained was certainly not milk.

Her half-opened eyes took in the details of the room before they closed. When they opened again, her vision was clearer, she saw the two Kings. Her sense of smell also became more acute; mixed with the fumes of alcohol were the unpleasant odors of long human occupation in an unaired and musty cave. Again her eyes closed.

When she opened them, Jack King was approaching, a glass in his hand. He bent over and began to pour a liquid between her half-parted lips. The taste was like the taste of fire.

"No!" she cried. "I don't want it!"

"That makes no difference," said King fiercely. "Sit up and drink it."

She obeyed perforce, trying meanwhile to grasp an idea which took vague shape in her mind. It had to do with Carter Wythe Woodfill and it was something consoling, relieving, happy. Her effort was vain; she lost all consciousness of anything but the streaming fire which choked her and strangled her.

"Get up," ordered Jack King.

She obeyed; her throat still burned painfully, but the drink had given her strength.

"March!" said he, taking a revolver in his hand.

"Where?"

He pointed to a ladder. "Beat it!"

With joy which was hysterical, Nellie Edna began to climb. Half way up she slipped and at once felt Jack's hand behind her waist, supporting her. "Go on!" he ordered. Terror faded away; again she almost grasped the idea which tantalized her. She began to laugh and heard instantly a loud "Shut up!" notwithstanding which, she continued to laugh. Let them think her mad! Already the atmosphere was

changing; it was still foul but it was less foul. She felt a hunger for more air, reaching it she would breathe great breaths. Anticipating this rapture, she stopped short.

"Go on!" ordered the harsh voice again, in it a new tone of desperation.

Above her a trap-door was propped open. The top of her head was already on its level, but she could go no farther. Seeing her falter, the older King seized her with both hands and forced her up, so that she lay across the floor. She crept on and remained kneeling. The two men came up behind her.

"Goin' to leave her here?" asked Lute.

"An' have her run out and git everybody on our track? Pick her up."

Again Nellie Edna was picked up like a bag of meal. Now she was carried out a door, and the cool winter air touched her cheek, but she did not breathe it in in gasps as she had intended. Above her shone the stars, but she did not see them. Before the door stood the old car of the Kings and upon the floor in the rear Lute laid her roughly. Jack was already at the wheel, and his brother stepped in beside him. Jack loosened a brake and the car began to move slowly and almost without sound. They traveled on soft earth under trees until Lute said "Here we are!" and they came

out upon a narrow road. Jack started his engine and the car roared away.

"Makes a power of noise," muttered Lute uneasily.

"Not more than always," replied Jack in a surly tone. "Nobody'll hear in the woods. When we get out on the highway there'll be other noisy cars."

"Where you goin' to put her off?"

"Down here where she'll have a long walk back. About daylight. It's goin' to snow; I'm glad to be gittin' south."

After a long time Nellie Edna uttered a moan. The effect of the liquor was wearing off, the tang of the cold air and the pain of her cramped position roused her. She tried to change her position and could not move and she began to cry. Instantly Jack stopped the car.

"We'll git to Cha'lottesvile soon," said he. "The woods is thick. Put her out."

Lute lifted Nellie Edna from the floor of the car. "It's powaful awkward!"

"Can't she do what you tell her?"

"No. But I can git her."

Bestowing fresh bruises upon Nellie Edna's body, he lifted her out. "You mean just lay her down by the side of the road?" he asked with some compunction.

"Just lay her down an' come on," said his brother

uneasily. "You hain't got as much call to pity her as you have to pity yourself if you git caught, let me tell you that! Come on!"

Nellie Edna involuntarily put her arms round King's neck and thus supported, felt herself raised upward. What she felt next was a cold surface. But it was a surface upon which she could stretch out. She moved her feet as far as she could, at once in relief and pain, and with a sigh, laid her cheek down upon the earth.

For a few minutes she remained motionless, then she opened her eyes. Something cool and soft was falling upon her cheek. The particles tickled her lightly and she tried to brush them away. Others came to take their place, and a little more nearly awake, she brushed still more. Another moment and she saw that she was not in utter darkness, but that above her, instead of blackness, there was a grayish ceiling with a dim interlacing of something which resembled the boughs of trees. She lay still, looking up and blinking.

"I'm not in the cave!"

As though the recollection of the cave brought with it an intolerable horror she felt deathly ill. She sat crying, loathing herself until the qualm had passed and she felt better.

"They've taken me far away!"

With great effort she rose and stood leaning against a tree. The ground sloped, she was on a hillside. "I believe that open space is a road," she said. "And daylight is coming. Perhaps it's Sunday morning!"

Overcome by weakness, she sank down. "I didn't have any supper and that awful stuff has made me sick." She began to cry feebly. The thought which had tantalized her almost took shape once more; as though it were a tangible and movable object it advanced, then again receded. It had to do with Carter. She saw the stone steps, the pit with Carter lying at the foot. At last the tantalizing thought was clear. "I must get back!" she said. "They hurt him! They gave him the whiskey as they gave it to me! I must get back!"

Shuddering she looked up at the sky — its gray was lighter. "I thought I might never see daylight again!"

She realized that it was not necessary to crane her neck so far, she could see part of the sky by looking almost straight forward.

"I'm high on a mountain," said she. "Am I still on Stony Man?"

In a few minutes she could distinguish the individual trunks of the trees and the separate bushes which formed the thicket. There was undoubtedly a road before her covered with a layer of light snow. She

rose stiffly and stepped out upon it. Her foot turned in a rut — it was a road!

"I'll soon be limbered up," she said to encourage herself. "But I'm getting weaker!" She lifted her hand to her head. "I haven't any hat!" As she lowered her hand she regarded it stupidly; upon it she could see in the brightening light the stains of blood. She stooped, and gathering snow rubbed her hands, then she washed her face in the same way. "No one would give me a lift as I look now!"

The dawn grew steadily brighter, if that word could be applied to a process which was simply a lightening of the dark gray of night. She was descending toward a deep valley in which she could see no house. There would probably be a road at the bottom crossing the one upon which she was traveling; there might be a signpost at the intersection and she could tell where she was.

The last fifty yards of the descent she took on an unsteady run, being unable to hold herself back. There was a signpost, she approached it with a throbbing heart. Pointing in the direction in which she was headed there was a sign: "Charlottesville, 16 miles." She looked at it stupidly. "I'm miles from Briscoe's, and Carter Woodfill is lying in the cave!"

Suddenly her heart gave a leap. She saw the bright eyes of Professor Abernethy. "If I can ever help

you, you must let me know." She began to walk up the steep hill toward Charlottesville. "He'll help me!" she said aloud. She walked a little farther. "He'll help me!" she said again. After a while she began to count her steps, a hundred steps—then "He'll surely help me!"

She came at last to the brow of the hill and looked down. The next valley was less deep; she was getting out of the mountains. "He'll help me!" she said again. Professor Abernethy would get a car, or he would telegraph or telephone, he would do something. By and by she ceased to speculate about the details of what he would do.

In the valley there was a cross-road and again a sign: "Charlottesville 14 miles." On the intersecting road were the tracks of cars. Many had turned and proceeded in the direction of Charlottesville. Again the road ascended. "Someone will surely pick me up!" said she.

The snow was thickening, the tracks which had been made a short time before were almost obliterated. The flakes gathered on Nellie Edna's shoes, covered the side of her body, powdered her hair.

"It must be Sunday morning," she thought. "Surely people will be going to church!"

Hearing at last a welcome sound, she looked back. A truck with a powerful engine was approaching

rapidly. She stepped out into the road and held up her hand. It was not until the driver had blown many blasts that she realized that she was warned to get out of the way. The car was almost upon her before she tottered to one side. The driver looked at her at first angrily, then in amazement, and sailed past. She began to cry, and the tears drew fresh streaks down a face which had not been washed clean of earth and blood. She sobbed helplessly as the truck passed out of sight over a little rise, not realizing that the engine ceased to run. She saw, as she climbed on, a man waiting at the brow of the hill.

"I guess you don't drive a car, Sissy!"

Nellie Edna made no answer to this irrelevant remark.

"Or you'd know better than to try to stop a heavy truck on a slippery hill. Come on, I'll take you along. What's the matter with you?" he asked as Nellie Edna drew near. "Where have you been? What on earth has happened to you?"

"I don't know," said Nellie Edna in confusion.

"Do you belong round here?"

"No."

"Did somebody make you walk home?"

"Oh, no!" said Nellie Edna, weeping.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Charlottesville to find Dr. Abernethy."

"You mean the professor?" The truckman looked at her still more astounded.

"Yes."

"Well, get in. I know him. I often deliver goods at his house." Having hoisted Nellie Edna to the seat beside his, he clambered in. "Did somebody give you something to drink, Sissy?"

"Yes," wailed Nellie Edna. "And I'm against drinking."

"Well, I wouldn't cry over that if I was made to drink."

Nellie Edna laid her arm on the back of the seat and her head on her arm.

"Weak?" asked the truckman. "Had any breakfast?"

"No. Nor supper."

The truckman took a thick sandwich from a tin box hung near his head. "There!" said he. "Eat! Before you get through with that we'll be in Charlottesville. That's left from my lunch. I was driving all night."

Nellie Edna took a few bites and found that even her jaw was stiff.

"Chew it, that's right," advised the truckman. "If it wasn't snowin' we could see the buildings now."

Nellie Edna took a few more slow bites and felt revived. But she was light-headed and she could not

shape her words. They drove through a residence section and stopped before a gateway.

"You see in there? That's the University. Professor Abernethy, he lives on the range — you ask any student."

The trucker helped her down. "I'll say I'd like to know how you come out," he said with excusable curiosity.

"All right," promised Nellie Edna vaguely.

Swaying, she started toward the gate. The gate was wide, but she was not sure that she could get through. Inside, though it was Sunday morning, were many students; they seemed to be walking, all in one direction; then they seemed all to be standing still. Their motion and their cessation of motion were not imaginary; they had certainly all been walking, and now they were undoubtedly standing still. They had been walking briskly because they were bound for breakfast and were very late; they were standing still because a red-haired girl, hatless and with stained hands and face had called out suddenly "Help!"

CHAPTER XVII

IN TIME to prevent herself from falling, Nellie Edna laid her hand on a brick pillar. The students inside the gate took a step nearer, those approaching from without lengthened their stride; she stood surrounded by a large group of astonished young men. Her face grew pale, then crimson, she tried in vain to speak. One young man, more experienced or less dumbfounded than the rest, came forward.

"Can we do anything for you?" His voice had a rising inflection due to sharpening curiosity at sight of the stains of blood on Nellie Edna's face. "Are you hurt?"

Nellie Edna could have answered the first question, but at the second her wits wandered. The group of students moved nearer; others arriving, joined them.

"Can we do anything for you?" repeated the first student in a louder tone.

"I must see Professor Abernethy," she said with great pains and distinctness. With a vague idea that

she was addressing her school she straightened her shoulders. The act brought with it a recollection; she saw Carter Woodfill's face at the foot of the steps, pale, bruised, terrible to remember. "I must see him at once."

"What does she want?" Other students joined the astounded group.

"She wants Professor Abernethy," explained two or three voices.

A boy ostentatiously sniffed the air. "Do you get that aroma, friends?"

"I saw Abernethy go into the Club," said a lad who had just arrived.

"Let's take her there." The friendly student bowed to Nellie Edna and offered his arm. Into her cloudy mind came the notion that she was being made fun of. In her cloudy mind were forming other notions. She blinked violently and, as though a mist evaporated or a veil were rent between her and the world, she saw wide lawns and stately buildings and the crowd of faces, some amazed, some mischievous, some impertinent.

"I'm in trouble," she announced with dignity. "It's a matter of life and death. But I don't need to be supported; all I ask is for you to show me the way."

"This is the way." The friendly student walked by her side; the others followed. Another student

came running. "What sort of procession is this?" he shouted.

Nellie Edna was able to walk steadily, if slowly. Her coat was covered with clay which made light brown stains. Her shoes were yellow with mud, her stockings which had been tan color were brown. She put her hand to her head — no miracle had restored her hat.

"I guess I'm a sight," said she to the world at large.

"Not as bad as you think, probably," answered the young man gallantly. "You must have had an adventure."

Nellie Edna looked back over her shoulder. "I wish they'd go away," she said, the tears running down her cheeks.

Her guide waved his friends back. They obeyed, but came on, still keeping Nellie Edna in sight. Their numbers rapidly increased.

"This is the range," explained the young man.

In the distance rose a building with a lofty and beautiful dome forming one end of a great quadrangle. The sides were composed of low buildings with porticoes which joined in arcades so long that one could hardly see from one end to the other.

"It's a beautiful place, isn't it?"

The sight started Nellie Edna's tears afresh. "I've lost my handkerchief," she said miserably.

The young man put his hand into his pocket. "Lucky!" said he, and passed her a smoothly folded square. "Here's the club — shall I call Professor Abernethy?"

Nellie Edna looked back over her shoulder. The crowd still followed; clearly it had received additions. "Can't I go inside?"

The young man went up the steps and entered the door and knowing nothing of the sacredness of the precincts in which she trod, Nellie Edna followed. She saw pale walls and ancient woodwork and old mahogany furniture and fires burning in grates. She heard the crackle of the flames and the low sound of voices. In a large room at the rear sat gentlemen in easy chairs. Vaguely she saw Abernethy's short and slender figure, his dark gray pointed beard, his black, astonished, kindly eyes. Two of the men rose from the dimly seen rear room and came to the door. She wondered vaguely why they came; she did not realize that she whimpered like a baby, or like one of the Briscoe dogs, disappointed because he was bidden to stay indoors.

"What in the world!" This exclamation came from a stout old gentleman who entered the front door, cigar in hand. "Are they penetrating even to this last fastness?"

There was something comical in the old gentleman's

speech and Nellie Edna laughed. The heat of the house made her feel faint in body and once more confused in mind. She tried to fix her eyes on Professor Abernethy's and to select facts which should make her errand plain. What she said had no immediate relation to her quest.

"There's probably the odor of alcohol about me," she announced in a shrill voice.

Abernethy looked more and more astonished, the gentlemen who had left their chairs came into the hall, the stout old gentleman stood gaping. Nellie Edna looked from one to the other — on these faces was amazement, distress and some annoyance, but no impertinence.

"You don't know me, do you?" she said in a silly tone.

Abernethy regarded her with profound concern. "You are — no, you can't be — yes, you are! — the young lady who so kindly gave us lunch along the Valley Pike last summer — Miss Strickhouser."

Nellie Edna smiled, and the resemblance of this wild-looking creature to the Nellie Edna of last summer was at once undeniable. From the jumble of ideas in her head, she selected the one at that moment uppermost. "You said we make our own luck."

"Yes, indeed!" Abernethy looked still more startled and concerned.

"You sent me books to Stony Man where I've been teaching."

"Yes. But what has happened to you?"

Nellie Edna looked round. The heat grew increasingly oppressive, her eyelids drooped above her flushed cheeks, her body sank back into the comfortable cushions of the sofa. Suddenly she opened her eyes wide, the pupils dilating. She sprang up and stood looking from face to face, seeing nothing.

"Could you give me something to wake me up?" she asked. "Life and death!" she cried in a loud voice. "Life and death!"

A gentleman stepped forward from the astonished assemblage. "Tell us just what has happened to you," he said. "I must know before I give you a stimulant."

With an effort as concentrated as that with which she struggled in the arms of Lute King, Nellie Edna stared at the kindly face. She saw one eye, then that faded out and she saw the other. She sat down once more.

"This is Dr. Fowler," said Abernethy. "He will help you."

"I fell into a cave," she explained slowly. "Carter Wythe Woodfill is there yet, hurt. I was caught—the Kings caught me, and gave me liquor to drink."

"What in the world?" cried the stout old gentleman again. "Is she out of her mind?"

"There's something seriously wrong somewhere, no doubt of that," said another voice.

Abernethy sat down on the sofa beside her and laid his hand on her wrist. Dr. Fowler came back with a glass. "Here," he said.

"Will it wake me up?" asked Nellie Edna.

"It will wake you up."

Nellie Edna blinked and blinked. She saw Professor Abernethy clearly, then one by one the other faces, and the quiet beautiful rooms opening one into the other.

"You do know me?" said she to Abernethy.

"I do, perfectly."

"I went to the mountain to teach school, because you said we make our own luck."

"I remember."

"I live with Mrs. Lightfoot Briscoe. A few miles away lives Carter Wythe Woodfill and his Old Auntie."

"Those are good names," commented the stout old gentleman. "Old names in Virginia."

"I walked in that direction yesterday. There was no smoke from the chimney and I went into the house and Old Auntie was there alone. Her name is Mrs. Fogelsang."

"Fogelsang!" repeated the stout old gentleman. "Long ago there was a Fogelsang here!"

"Carter Woodfill had fallen into a deep hole with steps leading into it. They had a park once with springs. I could see him lying there. I tried to help him but I slipped down myself, farther than where he was. There were men there named King distilling liquor. They were frightened, and they brought me far away. Yesterday afternoon I guess it was." Nellie Edna gesticulated wildly. "Now I'm here! I woke lying in the woods."

"Did they hurt you?" asked the old gentleman in horror. "Why, there's blood on your face and hands!"

Nellie Edna put her hand into her pocket and drew out the piece of glass and the button. "I found these when I was creeping round." She put them into Abernethy's hand and he flattened his palm so that all might see. The old gentleman reached over. "A button from a Yankee uniform! Where did you say you found it?"

Dr. Fowler lifted the piece of glass. "This is a fragment of an old beaker," he said amazed. "You didn't find this in a cave?"

"Fogelsang was here two generations ago," said the stout old gentleman. "He was a chemist with all sorts of wild ideas. He was sympathetic with the North and he vanished during the war."

At this moment the stimulant finally had its effect.

Revived, Nellie Edna knew where she was, how she had come, and what she had left behind her. She began to cry, not whimpering, but with wild and dreadful sobbing.

"While you sit and look at me, he'll die!" she cried. "He's in that dreadful hole, and Old Auntie's in the house. If the Briscoes haven't gone there she's frozen. And the Briscoes will think I'm dead."

"You mean that there's someone actually dying in a cave," said Abernethy. "We'll help you, we'll go up at once. And bootleggers brought you down!" He looked about—the student who had escorted Nellie Edna stood in the corner, trying to reduce his tall body to insignificance. Abernethy caught his glance.

"Fishburn," said he. "Get a car that can travel mountain roads. And get an officer."

"I'll take my car, sir," said Fishburn. "Give me five minutes."

Fishburn was out the door with one turn of his body and down the steps with one spring. The group of students were standing between the club and the garage where his car was stored.

"Elmer Moxley's in the cave again!" he shouted as he approached. "Titian beauty captured by bootleggers and escaped after perilous adventures!" he yelled as he charged through their ranks. "We're

going in search of the cave and the bootleggers," he called, after he had passed them.

"This imprisoned young man's name is Carter Wythe Woodfill, did you say?" asked the old gentleman who hovered near Nellie Edna. All the gentlemen hovered near. From the lips of one, Nellie Edna heard the word "Incredible!"

"It's not incredible!" she wailed. "It's true!"

"You remember there was a young fellow caught in Kentucky," said another voice.

In another corner another figure tried to make itself as small as possible. Its eyes, set in a black face, seemed to bulge.

"It says in de song,

*His face was faib an' han'some,
His habt was true an' brave;
But now he lies a-sleepin'
In a lonely san'stone cave."*

"Get to work, Johnson," commanded the old gentleman. "Young lady, we'll be anxious to know how you come on."

Before the door of the Club sounded a loud tooting.

"Hadn't you better eat something?" suggested Abernethy.

Nellie Edna shook her head. "The truckman who

picked me up gave me a sandwich. I don't need anything more." She walked out the door and stepped into the car. Some of the students had followed Fishburn away and had not returned, but the group was much larger than that which had accompanied her from the gate.

On the front seat sat Fishburn and an officer, into the rear stepped Nellie Edna, Professor Abernethy and Dr. Fowler, who carried the black bag of a physician.

"Two men are going up on motorcycles," explained the officer.

After they had passed out the gate Fishburn looked intently into the mirror before him, an expression of guilt in his eye. Two motorcycles passed the car.

"They know the road those fellows use," explained the officer.

Again Fishburn looked into the mirror. Not far behind there was a car, behind that another, and yet another. They were small cars but each seemed to be carrying a good many passengers. There were many opportunities to turn off into side streets but none turned.

"Now tell us everything from the beginning, Miss Strickhouser," said Abernethy. "Ruckersville first, Fishburn."

"Yes, sir," said Fishburn, putting on speed.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT WAS half past nine when Fishburn's car passed through Ruckersville, a small village. The snow had ceased to fall and the sun was shining brightly. The road was slippery but not dangerous. Now and then Professor Abernethy or Dr. Fowler said nervously, "Not too fast!" but for most of the time they watched the road and patiently endured all bounces and jerks.

"When do you suppose this young man was injured, Miss Strickhouser?" asked Abernethy.

"I don't know. It was about three o'clock when I found him lying on the damp earth and unconscious. Either he had struck his head or someone had hit him."

"Had these Kings hurt him?"

"I don't know. They'd given him whiskey. Perhaps he surprised them as I did."

"And the old woman — what about her?"

"She has no one else to look after her. She says one sentence over and over — 'How long does it take for a man to die?' She's very, very old."

Dr. Fowler took the fragment of glass from his pocket. It was cylindrical with a turned lip. "This is a queer thing," said he, once more. "These beakers were designed for collecting gases in laboratory experiments. I don't believe any such have been used for fifty years."

"'Gases!'" repeated Abernethy. "A laboratory in a cave! The Yankee button may not mean anything. So many supplies were captured that a Confederate's coat buttons might have been, like his bullets, originally Union. There couldn't have been Union troops on Stony Man Mountain! And a chemical laboratory is incredible!"

"How about spies?" asked Fishburn excitedly.

Abernethy shook his head. "I expect it's just a stray button. When the war was over people wore any clothes they could get."

Having skirted the low hills they began to climb. The road would have been imperceptible had it not been for the tracks of the motorcycles.

"This is hardly a main-traveled road!" commented Abernethy.

"No," said the officer. "But it's a short road." He laughed ruefully. "We know all the roads — and so do the bootleggers."

Abernethy looked back. "We seem to be leading

a train of cars!" he said amazed. "Why, they're filled with students."

"Such news spreads like wildfire," said the officer. "You can't keep it quiet."

"Do you recognize any landmarks, Miss Strickhouser?" asked Dr. Fowler.

"Oh, no!" said Nellie Edna. "When I came down here I didn't see anything. I wish" — her hands grasped one another. "I wish we could go faster!"

"We'll be there soon," promised the officer.

"Are you well acquainted with this young man?" inquired Abernethy.

"No," said Nellie Edna, "I'm not."

The deciduous trees of the lower slopes gave place to thick growth of pine. The course of the road was plainer, cut as it was through close-standing trees.

"It looks like Stony Man," said Nellie Edna.

"We're on Stony Man," answered the officer. "We're within a couple of miles of the Kings' place and of Woodfill's."

The car surmounted a little rise and pointed its nose into a hollow. There the motorcycles were parked and one of the two uniformed riders waited for the arrival of Fishburn's car. He came to open the door and pointed upward. "There's where they came out."

"Down that precipice!" exclaimed Abernethy. "Can a car get up?"

"Yes," answered Fishburn. "Sure! If they got down, we can get up."

The car climbed, giving sickening jerks and lurches. The smaller cars came no farther than the parked motorcycles; there the occupants fell out in their haste and followed Fishburn's car on foot.

"There's a house!" cried several voices.

Before them rose a cabin, larger than the usual mountain cabin and almost hidden in a matted growth of trees and bushes and vines. On the rough porch stood an officer. "Gone!" said he. "No doubt of that."

"There's a trap-door somewhere," said Nellie Edna. "They carried me up a ladder."

The officer turned back into the house, followed by his mate. The students added still more speed to their breathless haste.

"Nobody allowed in here!" called one of the officers. "If there's anything to see we'll show it to you."

Abernethy stepped out of the car and stood as if paralyzed. "There's a giant tulip tree!" he cried. "There's a linden! They're not indigenous!"

With the aid of his supporting hand, Nellie Edna

jumped stiffly down. "You see it was a park, and everything's gone to ruin."

She staggered, and Fishburn took one arm and the officer the other.

"He's out by now, Miss," said the officer reassuringly. "He's got back his wind. I smell ham cooking, somebody's about."

"I hope so!" said Nellie Edna. "Oh, I hope so!"

They passed the slave quarters and the stables, climbed a winding path which was once a road, and came out at the front of the noble old house.

"There's where they live!" cried Nellie Edna, hysterically. "There's smoke from the chimney! Let's go round to the back — that door's open."

Still supported by Fishburn and the officer, Nellie Edna led the way. Close behind her walked Ab-ernethy and Dr. Fowler, behind them came a dozen students, the others having waited, hoping to be allowed to enter the Kings' house. Nellie Edna's feet dragged. Carter was here, he was saved, he would think her crazy. He would not like strangers to see his poverty, he would be furiously angry. "I'll go away," said she. "I've made a fool of myself. I'll go back to the Valley and hide my head."

The officer stepped to the porch and lifted his hand to knock. As his knuckles touched the door it opened and Lightfoot Briscoe appeared. He looked as though

he had not slept, his blue eyes stared. As if to find someone to think for him, he stepped back into the hall.

"Ma!" he called, and this time his tones were exactly those of a bleating sheep. "Ma! Ma!"

Cousin Dora appeared instantly. She wore the blue dress in which she had journeyed to the store, and her white necktie. In her hand was a frying-pan. Her face was red and contorted. Carefully holding the pan in a horizontal position, she stood on the threshold. The officer had returned to Nellie Edna's side and again had absently taken her arm, though she leaned heavily against Fishburn.

"Oh, Miss Nellie Edna, whar have you been?" cried Cousin Dora and took a step forward. "We been huntin' fo' you through the forest all night and the boys is weepin' at home, an'" — her gaze took in at last Nellie Edna's strange situation. "Oh, Miss Nellie Edna, what have you done? You suah didn't do nothin' to bring you in the clutches of the law!"

"No," said Nellie Edna. "Is Carter here?"

"Cahtah?" repeated Cousin Dora. "Cahtah, he went off an' lef' po' Auntie neitha' fiah no' food. If it hadn't been that we come —"

Cousin Dora finished her remarks to the empty air. Abandoning her supporting friends, Nellie Edna hastened toward the tunnel-like opening of the road

leading to the Briscoes'. Lightfoot followed, also all the company which she had brought with her. Cousin Dora set down her frying-pan and ran.

"There!" cried Nellie Edna. "In that ruined building."

The door of the spring-house still stood ajar, the heap of earth and stones lay beside the freshly opened orifice. The officer stepped through the door and taking a flashlight from his pocket turned the light downward.

"Here are steps!" he cried. "At the bottom lies a man." He stepped down quickly, throwing the light before him. "Hello, there!"

The feeble answer could not be heard by those above.

"You're all right now," said the officer loudly. "Your friends are here. Doctor, you come down."

"Get those shutters open," ordered Dr. Fowler.

There was a crash as a shutter flew outward. Nellie Edna uttered a nervous scream. "You can easily slip!" she warned. She looked down; the pit was illuminated by the bright sunshine, she could see Carter lying exactly as he had lain the afternoon before.

"I can see," said the officer. "There are steps going still farther and a sort of slide beside them."

Dr. Fowler stepped downward. Another shutter fell with a crash.

"Where are you hurt, my boy?"

"My head," answered Carter faintly. "And I think my leg is broken."

Dr. Fowler knelt and laid his hands gently on the long body. He made no comment on Carter's diagnosis. "We'll get you out quickly," he promised cheerfully. "I'm afraid we'll have to hurt you a little."

"I shan't mind being hurt," gasped Carter, his voice stronger. "I thought I was down here to stay. I dug away the débris in the spring-house and found steps. I was looking about and something happened to me — either I fell or someone struck me. I had a delusion that there were men about, and I smelled corn-whiskey. I smell it now."

"I wouldn't talk," advised Dr. Fowler. He leaped up the steps; his gaze sought Cousin Dora. "Coffee!" said he. "And some simple food, quickly! And I want a stretcher. Get some poles and a piece of canvas or a couple of sheets or a carpet."

Cousin Dora showed her heels. "I got the coffee ready," she called over her shoulder.

"I kin git the poles," shouted Lightfoot and also showed his heels.

"Service!" cried an excited voice.

Dr. Fowler looked round. "Is the whole Univer-

sity here? Go and help him, some of you, and be quick about it."

"Is he alive?" asked Nellie Edna, stupidly.

"He's alive. But if I were you, I'd go away before we bring him up; you go and sit down or help the lady with the coffee."

"The coffee is at hand," announced Cousin Dora.
"So is some spoon-bread."

Dr. Fowler took the cup and plate and stepped down the strange stairway.

"Where's the nearest telephone?" he called back.

"At the Half-Moon Cave'ns," answered Cousin Dora.

"How far?"

"'Bout a mile, right out that road."

"Two of you fellows get out there as fast as you can, and telephone for the Staunton ambulance. Tell 'em to make the best time they ever made."

"You go, Jemmison, and you, Hale," directed Ab-ernethy. "You're sprinters."

"You boys will have to carry this poor chap out to the road," went on Dr. Fowler. "We must get him to a hospital and an X-ray as soon as possible."

Jemmison and Hale departed, having looked a little ruefully into the earth. Dr. Fowler went on down the steps.

"I'll git the covah for the stretchah," said Cousin

Dora. "You stay heah if you want to stay, Miss Nellie Edna."

Nellie Edna sat down on one of the low window-sills. She did not mean to disobey the doctor; she did not stay because Cousin Dora bade her stay; she stayed because she was unable to move. Abernethy descended into the pit, but soon reappeared, his face white as death.

"Any medical students here?"

A boy stepped forward. "I'm a medical student."

"You go down, please. Fowler needs help." Abernethy went over and sat by Nellie Edna. "That's a brave boy."

"Are they going to set his leg?" asked someone.

"Enough so he can be moved."

Lightfoot arrived with his poles, Cousin Dora appeared with hammer and nails and an ancient, faded, but strong carpet lifted from the floor of a bedroom; in a few moments the stretcher was ready. There was a shout from the pit, "What on earth!" then the voice of the officer whom they had left on the steps of the King cabin, sounding, not from outside the spring-house but from beneath. His tone was shocked. "How are you feeling, boy?"

Carter's answer was inaudible, and in another moment the officer came up the stairs. Cousin Dora looked at him aghast.

"You didn't git down!" she cried. "How did you git up?"

"I came from over yonder where the young lady got out."

"Didn't you git out of this hole?" demanded Cousin Dora of Nellie Edna. "Whar you got in?"

"No," said Nellie Edna. "I couldn't get out here. The Kings caught me and took me out through caves and through their house."

Cousin Dora made the preliminary motions for throwing her apron over her head, but thinking better of it remained with hands and arms uplifted.

"We found their still at last and a great quantity of stored liquor," announced the officer, excitedly. "We could hear the guides in the Half-Moon Caverns — there's apparently only a thin wall. There are large open rooms and there's running water. This poor boy's badly done up. We found" — the officer was young, inexperienced, and clearly shaken — "we found something besides a still."

"What was that?" asked Abernethy.

The answer was interrupted; from beneath ascended directing voices. "Careful! Steady! Careful! Steady!" Powerful shoulders appeared moving backward, then the end of a stretcher with a dark head upon it, a white face, a long body. The leg

of Carter's trousers had been cut away, and over him had been laid a coat.

Catching sight of his pathetic figure Cousin Dora threw up her hands once more, then pressed them to her mouth. Seeing her, Carter smiled. "How are you, Cousin Dora?" he asked.

Cousin Dora made a wild grimace. "I have my health, thank you," she answered.

"We'll move right ahead," said Dr. Fowler. "Are all the athletes ready?"

Again Abernethy looked about with an appraising eye. "Allen, Fitch, Conway — and you other three big chaps, I don't know your names."

"Yes, sir." The six stepped out, also with a slightly rueful glance downward.

"I'll go with ye," offered Lightfoot. "An' I'll spell ye. This young man's my kin, fo' one thing, and fo' anothah he has my high respec'."

"Yo' Auntie's in my care," said Cousin Dora.

Carter's eye, again seeking Cousin Dora, fell upon Nellie Edna. His gaze seemed to cling, like a clinging hand, which was not strange, since Nellie Edna's face was still unwashed. "What happened to you?" he asked faintly.

Nellie Edna was unable to answer — pity, remorse, still wilder emotions choked her.

"She's the one that found you, Cahtah!" cried

Cousin Dora. "She's like you, she's been in the nethamost."

"She has!" said Carter faintly, and closed his eyes.

"Ready!" said Dr. Fowler. "Now, steady and careful!"

The procession moved toward the tunnel-like road, was framed for a moment in the opening, then vanished.

"Advantages in being a slow walker and under-sized!" cried a student excitedly as he started down the stairs. "The first cop said something about a lower level. Have we got a rope?"

"Hold on!" called Abernethy. "Back here, young man!"

The young man returned reluctantly.

"We don't rush into this thing without any preparation," said Abernethy. "Officer, you mean that you came through from the Kings' cabin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any dangerous places?"

"None, sir."

"Nothing must be touched, gentlemen, not a thing! No souvenirs, remember! This isn't your property, it's the property of that poor boy. How many of us are there?" Abernethy began to count.

"Are you going with us, Mrs. Briscoe?"

"Not me!" Cousin Dora declined with decision.

"I'm no bootleggah, an' no mole. Them what wants to go, kin go."

"Are you coming, Miss Strickhouser?"

Nellie Edna had continued to sit in her window-sill. She rose now and walked across to where the officer was standing.

"You say you found something down there besides a still?"

The officer looked uncomfortable. "Yes, Miss."

"I found something down there too. I didn't know what it was then, but I know now. I put it in my pocket."

"Yes?" said the officer.

"I found a button from a soldier's coat, and the old gentleman took it. I found some glass, and Dr. Fowler has that. I still have a little stone in my pocket that I found. It isn't a stone—I know that now."

"No?" said the officer, still as if in inquiry.

"It's a bone," declared Nellie Edna.

"It is?"

"It is, and you know it," said Nellie Edna shrilly, swaying as she spoke. The officer put out his arm quickly, but Cousin Dora reached her first.

"Perhaps you're mistaken," said Abernethy.
"Where is this bone?"

"In my coat pocket." Nellie Edna stood shivering and making no effort to reach her pocket.

"May I get it?" Abernethy drew out a small object. He contemplated it, astounded. "It's certainly part of a man's hand!"

"There are more where this came from," said Nellie Edna.

A head was thrust above the floor. The second of the officers who had entered the King house appeared.

"I've been looking round," said he. "There's a sort of chemical laboratory fixed up fine — bottles and what they call a retort. And three men."

"Men!" cried a student.

"Not alive!" said another, and his companions laughed hysterically.

"Old Fogelsang, he was a chemis'," said Cousin Dora. "An' Pappy said often he was fo' the No'th and the folks was all afraid of him."

One of the students hazarded a wild guess. "Do you suppose he was making poison gas?"

"Impossible!" replied Abernethy. "Nonsense! There was no such thing."

"He might have tried," said another student.

"He might have had the idea," said another.

"The ancient Chinese thought of it," said still another. "He might have been experimenting."

Speech, whether speculative or otherwise, was

heard no more. Into the hole descended Professor Abernethy and the students. The officer whose head projected turned to lead the way, the officer who had come up first brought up the rear.

"I'll bet he can rent this place to the Caverns people," said he. "It's better than what they've got."

The voices faded away. In the quiet came a new sound, a melody which seemed to float on the air.

"What's that?" asked Nellie Edna, sharply.

Cousin Dora took her hand. "Perhaps the souls of the depahted is floatin' upwahd, now that the way is open. Anyhow, let's you an' me git out of this graveyahd, an' git some coffee in us."

"It's singing!" said Nellie Edna, hysterically.

The melody was interrupted; there sounded a bar of song, then a sob, then another bar, then another sob.

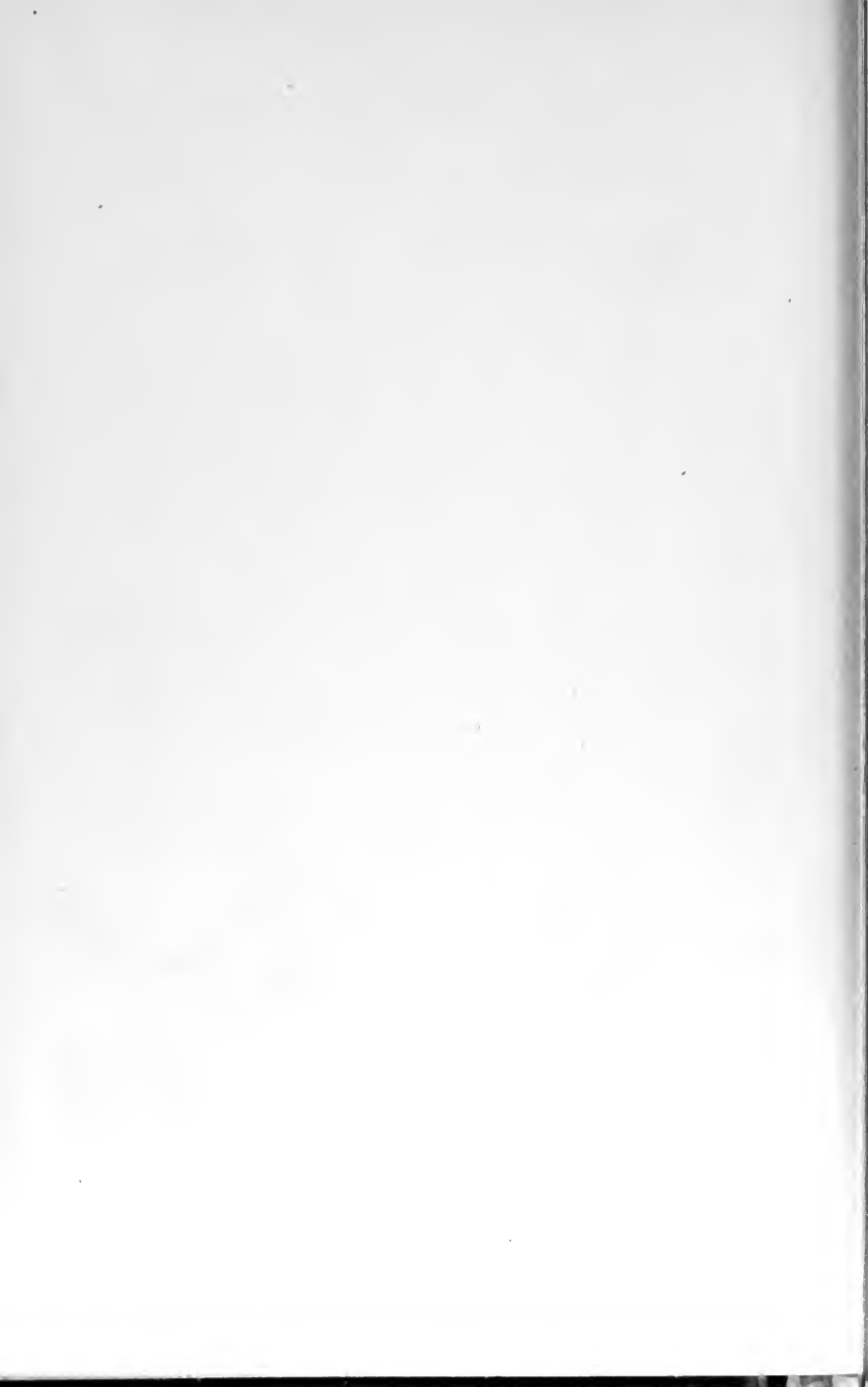
"'My gal's a brown-eyed dandy'" — words and tune were unmistakable.

"My land, it's them Cap Stubbses!" cried Cousin Dora. "They was 'fraid to stay home and 'fraid to come, an' they're singin' to keep their courage up."

In the road appeared the three Briscoes. They had traveled, it was clear from the condition of their clothes, not on the road, but through bushes and briars. Woodfill was in the middle; seeing Nellie Edna, he broke away from the hold of his brothers



*Miss Nellie Edna, it Seems as though You Stood Enough
Already*



and rushed across the open space to fling himself upon her.

"You was lost!" he wailed. "You was lost!"

"She war," said Cousin Dora. "But she ain't los' now. Did you fix you any breakfas'?"

"No," said Dobie.

"Then come in, come in," said Cousin Dora. "We'll eat good, an' what we help ou'selves to we'll make up to Cahtah an' Ol' Auntie, and while we eat we'll talk, mannaahs or no mannaahs. Miss Nellie Edna, she's got wondahs to relate."

"Where's Cahtah?" asked little Woodfill.

Cousin Dora had stepped into the house. In an instant she reappeared, on her face a strange look.

"Oh, Miss Nellie Edna!" said she. "It seems as though you stood enough already, but —"

"What is it?" asked Nellie Edna.

"I fed Ol' Auntie good, and she was all right, but she's fell asleep to stay. She won't say again, 'How long does it take fer a man to die?'"

Cousin Dora threw her apron over her head, then she lowered it. Nellie Edna stood at the bottom of the steps, looking up, her arm round little Woodfill. Cousin Dora continued to look down, and Nellie Edna to look up.

"Your hands are shaking!" screamed Nellie Edna.

"You're quiverin' like a leaf," cried Cousin Dora.

"She couldn't have known those men were there!" cried Nellie Edna. "She couldn't have! She couldn't have! She didn't mean how long did it take for those men to die? Did somebody shut them down there?" Nellie Edna's question was a shriek.

Cousin Dora came down the steps and laid her hand on Nellie Edna's shoulder.

"Miss Nellie Edna," said Cousin Dora solemnly. "Them was awful times, awful times. It would be bad enough to have the yearth cave on 'em. Or the vapo's they made could 'a' killed 'em, an' the friends let them lay in peace as they was. That's what happened. Let us not have worser thoughts. Let us —"

"Do you think she knew?" wailed Nellie Edna.

"She might 'a' knew," said Cousin Dora. "That could 'a' been."

Nellie Edna sat down on the steps. Her arms went round little Woodfill and she sobbed upon his shoulder.

"That is right," said Cousin Dora. "You cry. An' hencefo'th let all people love one anothah."

CHAPTER XIX

NELLIE EDNA sat on the upper step of the porch of her aunt's house on the Valley Pike. It was summer once more, the house was freshly painted and very white, the Crimson Rambler was sending out new shoots, the smoke-tree was in bloom, and the grass was like velvet. The scene was somnolent to the eye but lively to the ear. From the porch, shaded by Virginia Creeper vines, sounded voices — one, two, three. One was that of Aunt Myra, one that of Cousin Hallie Briscoe, one that of Cousin Dora Briscoe.

Nellie Edna's dress was like the grass in tone, but much duller and deeper in shade — it was astonishing how few mistakes she made in her selection of colors. She leaned her shoulder against a pillar, her hands were folded. Now and then a flush appeared on her cheek. The flush came simultaneously with one of two events, either the horn of an automobile tooted from the south, or else Aunt Myra answered

some remark of her guests, or volunteered some observation.

Few of the remarks concerned Nellie Edna; her blush was due to fear of what Aunt Myra might say, rather than to confusion at anything she had already said.

Aunt Myra wore a blue dress of a very bright shade, with stockings and beads to match. She had grown stouter and she filled the armchair from rim to rim. She had given her relatives a good dinner, as kinship and custom dictated; she was now wishing that they would go. As last year, she intended to go with them, and again she did not like to announce her intention until they announced theirs. She looked now at Nellie Edna, now at them, and now at the road, and she gave the motion of the rocker a powerful impetus with her foot.

At the gate stood a car, like, yet different from, the car which had waited on last summer's excursion. It was of the same make, and of about the same age, but the excelsior was pressed into different shapes. It was not the car of Mrs. Hallie Briscoe, but the car of Mrs. Dora Briscoe.

"It was only right that this time I should fetch Hallie ovah," Cousin Dora explained. "She often enough fetched me ovah."

"Can you have the cah whenever you want?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"I suah kin!" said Cousin Dora. "Lightfoot, he still likes his Ol' Slow."

Cousin Dora's dress was dark red, and a small hat had taken the place of the black bonnet with the red roses. There were many other changes in her appearance; for one thing the unfastening of a hard knot would have offered no great difficulty, and when she smiled, which was frequently, she showed not a dark orifice but a row of gleaming teeth. Moreover, she sat upright and did not rest the heel of one large shoe upon the toe of the other.

Cousin Hallie also had changed. She did not sit in one of Cousin's Myra's comfortable armed rocking-chairs, but perforce in a rocking chair without arms, and there were moments in which she seemed about to lose her balance. Her dress was the same bright rose as last summer; though it had been made larger, it was not quite large enough, and at times she sighed. Her mouth was open in astonishment a good deal of the time. Cousin Dora no longer spent a few days with her as in other summers; she drove down in the morning and back in the evening, and this was Cousin Hallie's first opportunity to hear all the details of the adventures of Nellie Edna. She was at

present hearing a part of them over for the third time.

"So then she went to the cave," said she. "I can't understand what she was doin' there huntin' this strange boy."

Cousin Dora shifted her position.

"You git ahead of the story, Cousin Hallie! An' this boy was no strange boy. You see, she says to us, 'Why don't you make basticks an' take 'em to Aunt Myra to sell fo' you to the tourisses?' Well, we made the basticks, but Lightfoot, he didn't need to come to the Valley; the man at the cave'ns, he wanted all the basticks as could be had. So Lightfoot, he come home, an' that aftanoon, havin' money in hand, we went to git flouah an' sugah, an' sech. They was no call fo' Miss Nellie Edna to go 'long, you kin see that.

"Well, Miss Nellie Edna, she went to take a little walk, an' then she was comin' to meet us, an' she walked till she could see there was no smoke comin' from the chimney of Cahtah Wythe Woodfill's house, you undastand that?"

"Yes," said Cousin Hallie.

"Wasn't that so, Miss Nellie Edna?"

"It was," assented Nellie Edna, turning her face a little away.

"Well, then, it was only the paht of a Christian to

go on, an' lo an' behold! she found Ol' Auntie with no fiah."

"Hadn't this boy left her no fiah?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"He had left her fiah, but he had fell in the cave," explained Cousin Dora patiently.

"But how did Nellie Edna get to the cave?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"She walked; it was in sight. She looked down an' seen him layin', all white an' pale an' well nigh in pieces."

"But why did she go in?"

"Wouldn't you go in, with him layin' well nigh in pieces?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Cousin Hallie positively.

"Would you leave him lay?"

"I would, an' I would 'a' went for help."

"Well, you're different from me," said Cousin Dora. "I would 'a' done just as Miss Nellie Edna done."

Without apology Nellie Edna rose and went into the house. The voices followed her.

"Does she like this boy?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"We all like him," said Cousin Dora. "He's a fine old fam'ly and he's a good boy an' a educated boy."

"Where is he now?"

"He's at the University. They all got interested in him when through Miss Nellie Edna they found him layin' in the cave, and because of his old name."

"Is that so? Did he sell his place?"

"He rented the paht undaground," explained Cousin Dora. "It's a great advatisation fo' the Half-Moon Cave'ns, they nevah had such trade as since these findin's was made. You see thar is the spring undaground in sight, what they nevah dreamed of havin'; thar is the still what they is allowed to keep an' show; thar is the place whar the bodies laid."

"Is the bodies there?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"Oh, no, of course not!" Cousin Dora's tone was a little discouraged. "Them they buried nice and quiet in the cemetery. Cahtah, he didn't rent outright, he rented at so much on what they take in. He's a smaht boy, he is."

"An' what become of those bad men?" asked Cousin Hallie.

"Jail," said Cousin Dora. "Penitentiary. They caught 'em easy."

"I can't undastand how those bodies got in the cave," said Cousin Hallie. "Was they alive when they went in?"

"Of course they was alive!" said Cousin Dora. "An' nobody else undastands. But the history

writahs an' othah lea'ned men, they guess they was tryin' some experiment an' they got killed or shet in."

" 'Shet in? ' " repeated Cousin Hallie. " Was they shet in? "

Aunt Myra gave her chair a vicious swing. " Don't you read the papahs, Hallie? " she asked, crossly.

" None but the funnies," confessed Hallie unblushingly. " Orphan Annie I read, an' Tillie the Toilah, and Cap Stubbs. The rest of the news is all the same from day to day."

Aunt Myra leaned forward so that she could look into the hall. She saw that it was empty.

" She's a little odd at times," said she. " One day I stahted the record goin' about the boy in the cave an' she cried something fierce."

" I'll bet that hurt her! " said Cousin Dora. " I don't believe she evah told us all she went through. Cousin Hallie, if you didn't know 'bout Nellie Edna an' the cave, I guess you didn't hear tell of the new school on Stony Man."

" No, I didn't," said Cousin Hallie.

" Well, it's this way: when all the scientific people come up from Cha'lottesville and saw the school, they said these was children what ought to have a chance. The schoolhouse is fixed up, we have fine books an' pictuahs an' a harnomium to lead the singin'. Miss

Nellie Edna stayed the wintah through, an' now we got anothah good teachah fo' next wintah, while Miss Nellie Edna's in college. It's not altogethah outside the boun's of possibility that my boys'll go to college. I've got three — Dobie, age' thi'teen, Stonewall age' eleven, Woodfill age' nine."

Cousin Hallie blinked — this prophecy was too wild to be intelligible. "I thought Nellie Edna had so many beaus," said she.

"That doesn't say she's goin' to take any," said Cousin Dora uneasily. "Miss Nellie Edna's one to improve herself, she's not one of yo' 'come day, go day, God send Sunday' folks."

"It would be a cross to me to go to college if I could have a beau." Sighing, Cousin Hallie rose. "We got to leave, Dora. Sam, he wanted off this aftanoon a little to go see his sistah and I said I'd tend the gas. Business ain't so good. Sometimes Sam an' I, we think we'll move no'th."

Aunt Myra rose quickly. "I'm goin' along," she announced in a loud whisper. "There's somethin' goin' on here. For a long time John Niblett's been ridin' past and ridin' past. He has a bran new cah, he gets a new cah every year. She nevah lifts her head, but yestaday mornin' he caught her at the lettah box an' she couldn't get away. He talked to her."

"He did!" exclaimed Cousin Dora. "Who is he?"

"He's an old beau," explained Aunt Myra, complacently. "He's very well fixed. His father died an' left him a garage. She might 'a' had him last summah if it wasn't for that professor comin' an' eggin' her on to teach an' improve herself."

Cousin Dora remained standing. "She egged Cahtah Wythe on," said she irrelevantly and uneasily. "She egged him on to hunt his cave an' his springs."

"You see what comes of eggin' on," said Aunt Myra.

Cousin Dora made an odd motion, as though she were going to throw her apron over her head.

"How do you know anything's goin' to go on?" inquired Cousin Hallie.

"She said she expected a friend, she told me so."

"Then I guess she won't go to college," said Cousin Hallie.

"I'll say her college days are ovah," said Aunt Myra.

"I don't see why," said Cousin Dora, uneasily.

Nellie Edna stepped out upon the porch. She had changed her green dress for one of dull pink, also an admirable choice, though the combined color scheme of her pink and Aunt Myra's bright blue and

Cousin Hallie's bright rose and Cousin Dora's dark red was startling. Nellie Edna's flaming cheeks added still a new shade.

"I'm going for a ride at three o'clock," she announced.

"That's all right," consented Aunt Myra. "We'll close the house and when you come back you'll find plenty to eat. There's cold chicken an' peaches and tomatoes. I guess you won't want to cook anything at that hour."

"I'm invited out for supper," said Nellie Edna.

"You don't say he invited you for suppah!" exclaimed Aunt Myra.

"He did."

"Where?"

"In Charlottesville. He called it dinner."

For a long moment there was no sound.

"Well, Nellie Edna, I don't want you to be cross with me," said Aunt Myra impressively at last. "But watch your step; what you let slip twice is gone for good. He has a fine business, he's his own boss. If you only know how to manage him, you —"

Nellie Edna's cheeks were like red apples.

"I don't expect to manage him," said she. "I expect him to manage me."

"It don't pay to be too humble," warned Aunt Myra. "He —" Aunt Myra glanced toward the

gate and ceased to speak. "We ain't got off in time," said she, at last.

Cousin Hallie turned her body ponderously and also regarded the gate. "You said he had a grand cah!"

Cousin Dora too turned and looked out at the gate. Mysteriously and powerfully affected by what she saw, she sank down in the lowly seat which had been Nellie Edna's.

"That ain't John Niblett!" said Aunt Myra.

"That cah's like my cah, only the new style," said Cousin Hallie. "That's no grand cah."

Cousin Dora turned and looked at Nellie Edna. Cousin Dora was pale, but she grinned, displaying her gleaming row of teeth. A young man came up the walk. He was hatless and tall. He held his head erectly, his eyes were bright, his dark blue suit was well made; Mr. Beekman who a year ago came up the same walk presented a no more elegant appearance.

"This is Mr. Woodfill," said Nellie Edna. "My aunt, Mrs. Funkhouser, and my cousin, Mrs. Samuel Briscoe. Mrs. Dora Briscoe you know."

The three ladies bowed. The young man shook hands with Nellie Edna, then with Aunt Myra, then with Cousin Hallie, then with Cousin Dora.

"Well, Cousin Dora!" said he, apparently with delight. "How are you?"

"I have my health," replied Cousin Dora, making uncouth sounds.

"I'm going to show Nellie Edna the University," said he. "I'd like her to take a summer course there sometime. We'll be back in good time."

"Yes, sir," consented Aunt Myra, from her daze.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes." Nellie Edna walked down the step. "Good-bye, Cousin Dora, I'll see you soon. Good-bye, Cousin Hallie, you must come again. Aunt Myra —" Nellie Edna returned, and to the amazement of everybody, put her arm round Aunt Myra's neck and gave her a kiss. Then she went on down the walk and got into the young man's car.

"Can you beat it?" gasped Aunt Myra, sinking back into her chair. "That girl won't evah get arrested for tellin' too much!"

Cousin Dora uttered a sort of shout. "I ask you, did you evah see a tenderer look than he give her?"

"Who is that young man?" asked Cousin Hallie, sitting down also.

"That's the boy who was caught in the cave," explained Cousin Dora.

"The cave?" repeated Cousin Hallie. "Oh, yes, I heard about that."

"Would Nellie Edna Strickhouser turn John Niblett down for him?" demanded Aunt Myra.

“Let us hope,” answered Cousin Dora in a solemn tone. “Cahtah Wythe Woodfill’s smaht!” Her tone sharpened like that of a siren. “Educated! Handsome! Good! Kind! Kin of Lightfoot’s! Let us hope an’ pray she would! I suspec’” — Cousin Dora uttered an hysterical giggle — “I suspec’ she already has.”



